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This Is Not a Thesis

Nima Nikakhlagh
University of Massachusetts Amherst

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This Is Not a Thesis

A Thesis Presented

by

Nima Nikakhlagh

Submitted to the Graduate School of the University of Massachusetts Amherst
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

MASTER OF FINE ARTS

May 2021

Department of Art

This Is Not a Thesis

A Thesis Presented

by

Nima Nikakhlagh

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I will always be grateful for the opportunity I was given here at UMass to explore and live in the academic world of art where I could increase my knowledge and gain a better understanding of *art*, *life*, and *politics*. It truly pushed me to investigate myself and find out what my role – the artist's role – is in this world. Thank you to everyone who has been patient with me during these three years on this difficult path.

I express my gratitude to all the faculty and students, both past and present, who taught me something in any way and helped me to grow.

And finally, let me thank my thesis committee for granting me a space of freedom in which to distance myself from traditions, break the existing structures, and experiment and create new ones.

ABSTRACT

THIS IS NOT A THESIS

MAY 2021

NIMA NIKAKHLAGH, M.F.A., DEPARTMENT OF ART

UNIVERSITY OF MASSACHUSETTS AMHERST

Directed by: Professor Jeff Kasper

Reading the book *Perform or Else* by Jon McKenzie along with the social distancing, isolation and all the ongoing challenging and forced experiences of the 2020-21 Covid-19 pandemic era, on one hand, and my interests in *performance art* and *physicality*, on the other hand, made me think how can I create a work that represents an image of the body, the concept of action, and the idea of togetherness which are all essential for performance art, and/or for any performance.

All art disciplines combine theory and practice in order to depict the relationship between bodies, art, and education, and as history proves, theory is always intended to be put into practice. The *theoretical* and *practical* in this written thesis begins with its title *This Is Not a Thesis*; continues by furthering the idea of *Perform or Else*, asking instead *Thesis or Else*; and goes on to serve its purpose of being a theoretical concern, a narrative, a genre in and of itself, an exercise in authorship, and furthermore, function as a documentation of documentation of my art – performance – practice. The series of written pieces, performances (rejected proposals), and images (documents) compiled here are meant to create a space between authorship and performance art. *This Is Not a Thesis* demonstrates the rejection and acceptance of the same thing at the same time.

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INTRODUCTION

what represents what

"The death of interpretation is to believe that there are signs, signs that exist primally, originally, really, as coherent, pertinent, and systematic marks. . . . The life of interpretation, on the contrary, is to believe that there are only interpretations."¹

Let's imagine a triangle. Each point depicts the relationship between *bodies*, *art*, and *education*. There are also two circles, which overlay the triangle, that demonstrate two complementary movements within the triangle. These two circular movements, which we can call *culture*, take place in two directions at the same time: one, *the theoretical*, and the other, *the practical*. As history proves, theoretical culture, on one hand, is always intended to be put into practice. Practical culture, on the other hand, means to be the condition of the theoretical. One could say that bodies—through languages—are also and always caught up in a cycle. Considering this, the same movement is happening in what you are about to encounter: the theoretical and practical movements in this written thesis begin with the very act of naming the functions of art *and* education.

All the achievements of political artist-activists (aka *the activist*)² have been a step towards mirroring invisible and visible oppression. Artists must continue "to fight and struggle against injustice . . . by any medium necessary. The activist merges commitment to freedom and justice with the pen, the lens, the brush, the voice, the body, and the imagination."³ We should need then, for this end, to create a facility—an environment supportive of opportunity—to resist oppression, and with it, to put into practice the act of creation—an act of emancipation. This is the power of art as language. The facility, here, as this aesthetic argumentation represents, is the theoretical-practical appearance of the function of art *in* education.

Now, imagine a gallery, a room, a classroom, an office, with one or more desks, with one or more chairs. You are reading something. *This Is Not a Thesis*. In the first place, this is an object, an artistic object that is recognized as an MFA thesis. Just as an art object that is only an object of representation at the beginning, along with many other things, and then, it will be transformed into an art object—a thing—by being presented in official places such as galleries, museums, festivals, a published artist's book, etc. This happens during, and happens through, a process of becoming.

"Thing, in its most general sense, is interchangeable with 'entity' or 'being' and is applicable

to any item whose *existence is acknowledged by a system of ontology, whether that item be particular, universal, abstract, or concrete. In this sense, not only material bodies but also properties, relations, events, numbers, sets, and propositions are—if they are acknowledged as existing—to be accounted [as] ‘things.’”⁴ What is in your hand is simply a thing. This thing is a subject-object (a person-thing) volume “in which it is used to denote a subject of consciousness or experience.”⁵ It is, arguably, a written document that officially plays its role as a thesis, hence, the title and the position of it are set within a specific frame. This thesis presentation is an opportunity for a Master of Fine Arts student to be officially identified as an artist in the real world. The role and the purpose of this thesis or any thesis—as a graduation requirement—is to recognize an art student as an artist. Thus, I am an artist. Therefore, I am not only a student, but I am also a student-artist. In the meantime, I believe that all artists are, and will remain, students of art even if they are not officially recognized as such.

As Foucault describes, “[c]ontradiction could exist only between two statements, or within one and the same statement.”⁶ As its title reveals, the effacement of word-relationship and the juxtaposition of two lines (this is not a thesis—a thesis presented by...) are the center of this thing (thesis). One escapes from, and the other returns to, its double purpose: its subject, and functionality. Art = Aesthetic Education = We = I = A Work of Art = A Thing. And it perhaps includes the criticism around them.

To emphasize the function of art in education and to focus the audience’s attention by the very act of naming, the title of this work uses the possibility of repeating the same words in different statements with different directions, and as Foucault would contend, “profits from the extra richness of language that allows us to say different things with a single word. The essence of rhetoric is in allegory.”⁷ *This Is Not a Thesis* demonstrates the rejection and acceptance of the same thing at the same time. Hereupon, this proposed thesis book serves its purpose of being a theoretical concern, a narrative, a genre in and of itself, an exercise in authorship, and furthermore, functions as a documentation of documentation of my art—performance—practice.

TOWARDS AN MFA

Image-text

During these 3/4 years?

First of all, I'm willing to admit, that I'm so excited and kind of nervous, because, you know, I feel this conversation will determine my future even my dream. By the way, I'm gonna do my best and hope that I make it.

Well... after a couple of months that I moved from Iran to California, (in August 2014), I started to communicate with people as an artist particularly with homeless people in San Francisco, and umm... you know... during that project, I collected different objects (like cardboards which homeless people use them to make a bed or a roof, and I collected a number of their handwritings... we were sharing food, and we talk about the stories of our lives. And also, I recorded a lot of sounds throughout the city) ... you know, it had a really good experience and practice right after I moved to the U.S through this communication with people, an idea of installation-performance came to me that I wish one day I could experiment and share my idea through a work of art with the public.

Besides that, I took a class at the Art Institute of San Francisco (Material Memory: Creating a record through an Archive) just to find an opportunity for studying and staying in touch with the art community.

umm... also, I've translated several essays and articles about different types of art movements like: Performance Art, Happening, Total art, and stuff like that... well, in this way, I'm going to update myself and be prepared for the university. (Allan Kaprow, Ben Vautier, Yoko Ono, Joseph Beuys, Gina Pane, Marina Abramovic, Yves Klein, Denis Oppenheim, Bas Jan Ader, Chris Burden, and Viennese Actionists like Guter Brus, Wolf Vostel, etc.)

از فرانسسکو به سان فرانسیسکو
→ Sound and video installation
جمع ادبی جدید / مشارکت بین ساعت
برای مقدماتی - آسان فرانس ها می خواند
هنرمندانی که مطالعه از آنرا به نظر می رسد

Why the U.S.A?

ایم. بارزوبت قاره (وکلیش) آمریکا بود.

Umm... after I traveled to about 15 countries from 2010-2014, and studied about the history of Performance Art and Happening, I realized during the 1950s to 70s the U.S, specifically NY city, has been the most important city for art movements in the whole world, and I know it still is. Meanwhile, I knew that I need to learn more about contemporary art, that's why I decided to move here and begin a new chapter of my life.

هنر معاصر و اتفاقات اخیر زندگی هنر

My Immigration situation:

when I came to the U.S, I thought that I need more time to stay here and learn more about art. So, I decided to apply for a green card and change my situation.

About my work:

هنر تجربی

In my opinion, to reach the idea of experimental art we need to re-explore the subject of art and design different experimental practices as well.

سفره هنر

I prefer experimental art rather than professional art as a job; even more, I like to make my works and, then... destroy them, like the same thing that children do. Umm... You know, I learned from children that they constantly make things and break them immediately, because they do NOT care about keeping the things they made, they just keep moving on. Obviously, in this way of creativity, only the experience would remain for them/us. Umm... So, I think the experience is the key to discover something new instead of repeating something over and over.

تجربه کلیدی برای کشف است.

Well, I think, experimental art always begins with a question and sometimes ends with a question. Umm... I still ask myself what is art? What is the purpose of art?

حقصورت هنر چیست؟

هنر چیست؟

نزد آه افروخته -
بچه (تجربه زندگی روی نم -
نشدن استعاره و بسیار

superperformance artist

work of art

قدرت ماندگاری اثر برای مخاطب

I think a critical live performance is the one that has a **lasting power** that means the real happening will start to happen inside of audiences right after they leave the event.

Let me explain what my thought as the main idea of the artwork and its relationship with the audience is. As a performance artist, I always ask myself, how can I remove the distance between the audience and the artwork. Umm... What are the boundaries of the relationship between the artist & the audience? Is it possible to change the assigned role of the artist & the audience? Ultimately, I'm thinking

about this idea... that how the audience could form the work..., make the work..., finish the work, and became the event through the work or become the work through an event? So that's why I'm so excited to be engaged with education and "experimental practice" to find my own answers.

Why Fine Arts instead of Theater:

تجربه دیدن نمایش - با بازیگری و فکر کردن

Let me start with theater first, I had worked and experienced theater more for 10 years even more, but I was, at the same time, thinking something is wrong with me, I was surprised why I'm not satisfied from theater, although I love it and enjoy it? After a few years of work, I realized the only thing that I was not satisfied with theater, was about showing, pretending! well... as you know, there is a big difference between the theater and performance art, in Performance Art everything is real but in the theater is not! In the other words, in the theater, we are pretending something whereas in performance art we are actually making something! Umm... also, studying Antonin Artaud and his works led me to explore the performance then conceptual art. As a result, I thought art... should be... to

هنرهای زیبا - هنرهای نمایشی

Art is all about humans. And humans are nothing unless experience, memory, and function.

make a change, first of all, change the mind. So, I was fascinated by 'conceptual art' and performance art and I swung to a new area.

Why UMass:

Well, there are multiple reasons that I think UMass would be a perfect place for me.

When Omid suggested to me to apply for UMass, I checked out the UMass Website, and umm... I read some of the faculty's statements..., and saw most of their works. Well, some of them are very interesting to me, as your works, also the works of professor Jahoda, and Colleen which I liked. For instance, the work of "this is that and that is this" or Remote Sensing, or your work which is "there it is our homeland, my dear", ... these are great.

Besides, I realized that the program's concentration is a multidisciplinary art, experimental practice, and research, right? So, this would be a great fit for me. Because, you know, my work is all about experimentation.

The other point, that makes me more interested, is Taking teaching assistance, I think this program will put me in a more professional and challenging place. The financial supports like TA and TO would help me to focus on my work better and challenge myself more as well for the duration of my MFA.

And as you know, the location of UMass makes a great opportunity for students to get involved with NYC and have the chance to meet the artists and be in the art world. So... umm... I am interested to study at UMass and I feel there is a much better opportunity for me to follow my dream and grow.

و من آنجا که من به دنبال یک محیطی هستم که بتوانم در آن کار کنم و یاد بگیرم و رشد کنم. و این محیط را در UMass پیدا کردم. و این محیط را در UMass پیدا کردم.

← پرورش در هنر

BODIES, LANGUAGES, TRUTHS

Instruction for the public:

Take me if you wish.

Feel free to make use of me, in whole or in part, in any way you wish.

Bodies, Languages, Truths

Contactless participatory performance

Nima Nikakhlagh

Spring 2021 (performed)

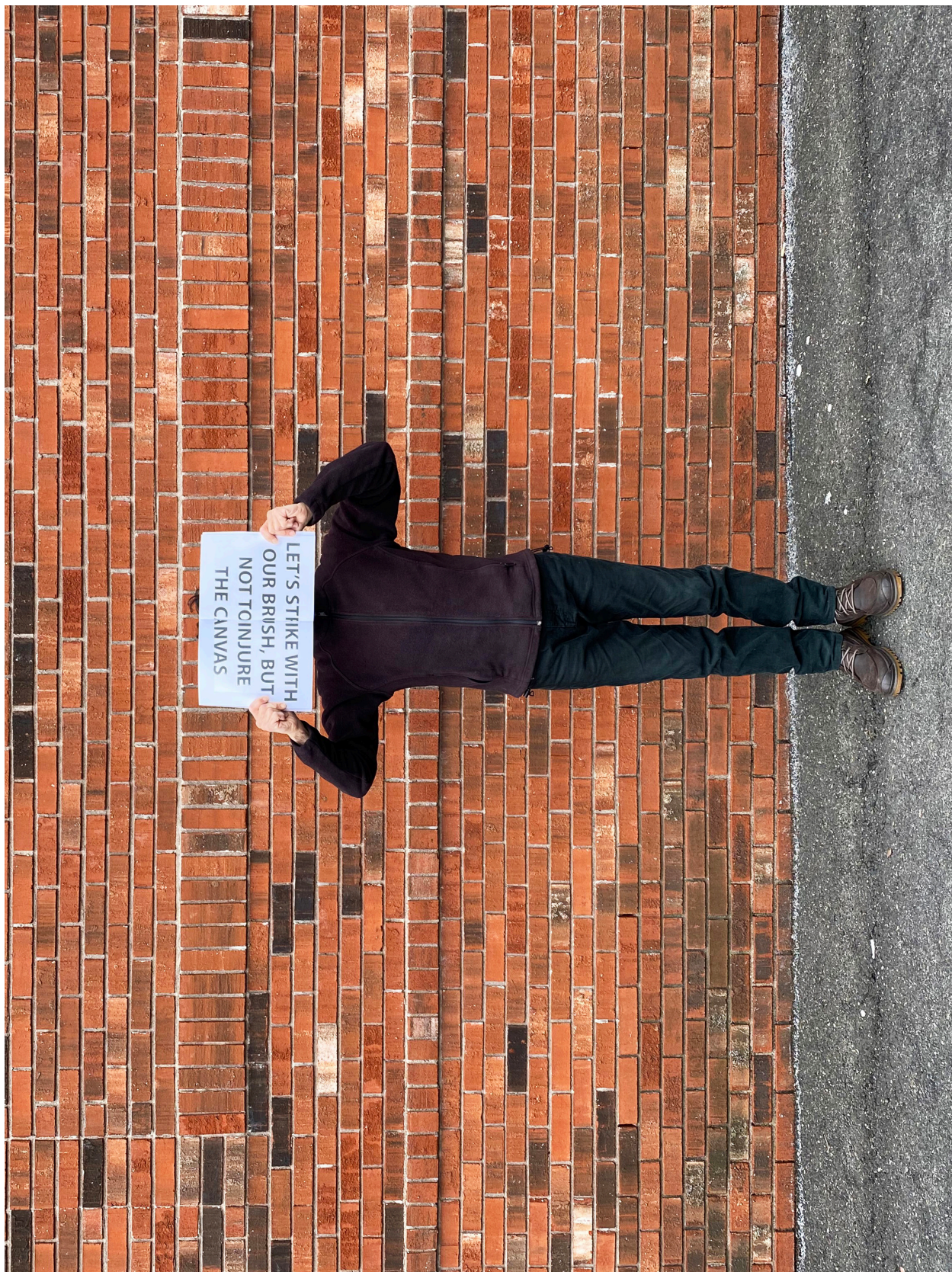
Location involved: Public space in the center of cities (Amherst, Boston, New York City...)

Materials: 300 half letter size published books

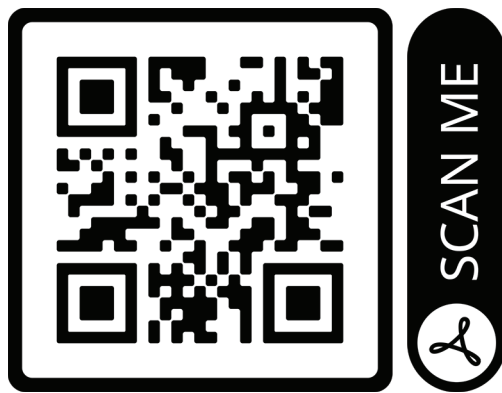
Performance arrangement: All books are hung freely using twine (on bulletin boards, at cross walks, on security gates...) or simply left on a surface (tables, counters, benches, seats on a bus...) in suitable places in public space in a way that draws the attention of passers-by.

Duration: It will take a couple of weeks or so for the artist to install all books throughout the cities. The duration of participation of the piece remains unknown – the piece is active as long as the books are in circulation.

Description: the artist is going to leave the printed books for unknown people in public spaces to be taken, read, written on, distributed, and shared with others in order to bring about spontaneous movement by more circulation, and therefore more action. This performative book art is a combination of different art disciplines such as poetry, visual art, and typography. It is meant to blend creative writing, philosophy, and social consciousness, and uses "Language" as a tool to utilize text to make a statement and draw out emotion. There is an instruction at the beginning of each book that informs the audience that they are allowed to take the book with themselves, and there is also another instruction at the end of the book that asks the reader to make this object useful in any way they choose or to simply pass it along.



Untitled (Bodies, Languages, Truths), performance still, 2021, photo by Kathryn Fjeld



Scan Me, QR Code, 2021

BODIES, LANGUAGES, TRUTHS

“Art is the impersonal production of a truth that is addressed to all.”⁸

Childhood is a sedimentary experience that can be re-extracted. *Bodies, Languages, Truths*—which borrows its title from Alain Badiou, who states “there are only bodies and languages, except that there are truths”⁹—is an exercise in joining poetry and performance art in a participatory literary framework. This experimental book, as an attempt in a strict alternation between action and writing, is a universal reference to the polluted political climate that governs the whole world [the earth]. In *Bodies, Languages, Truths*, we face two worlds. Two worlds that are side by side but at the same time are so far apart. Two worlds next to each other but in opposition to each other, just like paradise and hell. This juxtaposition exhibits the subject of this work that allows us to build radical questions. On one side is a childhood and on the other is the world of adulthood. By “adult”, I mean a grown-up with a full experience of afflictions and sufferings, friendships and enmities, dishonesty, gentleness, and brutality under the shadow of the manipulated definitions of Life, Love, Beauty, and Truth, that a child learns through time. As nineteenth century French historian Jules Michelet observed, “The child is the interpreter of the people. What am I saying? He is the people itself, in its native truth, before it is deformed; the people without vulgarity, without rudeness, without envy, inspiring neither defiance nor repulsion.”¹⁰ Hence, a child becomes a product of time, in fact the norm of the contemporary world, a postmodern human being that “in the regime of the ‘power of life’, is a slightly sad animal, who must be convinced that the law of the body fixes the secret of his hope.”¹¹ To Badiou, “in order to validate the equation existence = individual = body, contemporary doxa¹² must courageously absorb humanity into a positive vision of animality. Human rights are one and the same thing as the rights of the living. [...] This materialism is therefore a materialism of life. It is a bio-materialism.”¹³

For me, the moment of the collision of the two worlds—childhood and adulthood—is the moment when the invisible becomes visible—the truth—the reality of our lives even if we still ignore that truth. Furthermore, such a self-confrontation and the lived experience of personal trauma carried within us, along with the hegemony of world politics, brings us to the point of critical thinking and decision-making; the moment that we have to choose between two things: *the status quo* and *change*, continuity and discontinuity. The former, is the living body

in the dilapidated world sans any resistance, the latter is the same body, but thinking of the possibilities of something new in an old world, a new body.

There is an importance to knowing the original image of this work comes from a real situation: a living contradiction at home. There is an 'adult' and a 'child' in shared time and space, living next to each other but far apart. There is one body and language pit against another body and language. In this 'home' that I ironically liken to the contemporary world, bodies and languages are constantly facing each other. It refers to the world of childhood and the world of adulthood with two different times in the sense of history. Consequently, the image that emerges from the collision of these two associated objects (bodies and languages) is a vacant space that keeps us between the two things: paradise and hell. I recognize this void as the potential moment to choose, regardless of the law of theology, but with regard to a materialistic society and its possibilities of discontinuity—disobedience—in the context of socio-political resistance/activism. Perhaps, it is time for me to define this moment, in my artistic practice, as the moment of choice. Conceivably, it is room to depart from 'what is' towards 'what can be'. It is the possibility of a change in the world in which we live. Thus, this moment is available to each human being to grasp, to realize it in the act, and bring it into actuality, if there is any desire for it. That is to say, that we—bodies and languages—have the power to accept or not to accept something. In Agamben's words "each potentiality to do something is at the same time potentiality not to do something."¹⁴ For instance, as a poet has a potentiality to write but also not to write, a living body may or may not become a site of resistance. The moment of choice illuminates that the human body has the power to choose, and this choice can open the door to new possibilities for him/herself and for others.

A child's nature, and consequently his or her behavior, changes radically after visiting the world of adulthood. A child's nature adapts to, and is influenced by, the political world, and specifically institutionalized education. The concept of freedom for an adult bears no resemblance to their experience of freedom in childhood. To put it bluntly, it should be said that this childhood freedom is such an economic, social, and political metamorphosis, that it can no longer regain even the freedom that has been experienced; freedom from skin color, freedom from religion, freedom from nationality and nationalism, freedom in expression, freedom from capitalism and politics. It is politics whose bloody clutches do not free the throat of contemporary man even for a moment. One shall never forget that children are the future *people* who have always been transformed by the unrecognizable long-term programming (reproduction process) of the political system. So why shouldn't we oppose all that deprives our right to life.

What does it mean "to live"? In what space do we live? When do we live? Let us agree, to achieve the true meaning of life and happiness. To be free, one must first critique the confusing and distorted use today of the words *life* and *freedom*; a life that is hard to distinguish from images serving a neoliberal agenda, a tempting version of capitalism. To be free, one must seek a life that does not value contemporary democracy's non-stop free-market promises, circulated every single day through social media, television, newspapers, urban spaces, banks, stores, insurance companies, etc. To be truly free, one must thwart an eternal misguidance that is the dominant cultural ideology, an everyday lie. There is an old saying: the bigger the lie, the easier it

is to believe. Our life is progressively adulterated by commercial messages and indirect gestures of marketers, digitalization, and even by wars of all kinds. It is a fact that as soon as we leave our homes, we are bombarded by commercial advertising showing ideal versions of ourselves. So why shouldn't our force of resistance and invention be to distinguish between 'being alive' or 'to live', and also to criticize the system that governs our lives? This radical criticism of the paradoxical reality of our lives can make us face the importance of *Everyday Resistance*. "The concept of the "everyday" in *everyday resistance* is necessary to understand in contrast to the extraordinary or, [...] the "spectacular". [It] connects the everyday to "patterns", thus, something that is repeated in the lives of people, however, not necessarily literally "every" day."¹⁵

This is the emptiness of the contemporary human life that thinks they must still wait for 'Godot' and read 'Rhinoceros', the Rhinoceros that is supposed to be an allegory of a sheep. This invisible truth—the disappearance of the content of life—that no one wants to talk about today—is the seed of this participatory project. It is true that although we cannot prove the diminishment of life, we can observe it. As Badiou exposes in his critical philosophy, "[w]e will never understand what constrains us and tries to make us despair, if we do not constantly return to the fact that ours is not a world of democracy but a world of imperial conservatism using democratic phraseology. What is there to say about today's world? A solitary power, whose army single-handedly terrorizes the entire planet, dictates its law to the circulation of capital and images, and loudly announces everywhere, and with most extreme violence, the Duties and Rights that fall to everybody else."¹⁶

Philosophy universally shines its light on the dark side of human existence for illumination and 'the potentiality to act' by extracting philosophical concepts, referring to the origin of words and meaning, and returning to the root of things (objects and subjects). Poetry aims to accomplish 'the potentiality of speaking' by its ambiguity to not simply say what it is saying. This literary-performative work (both philosophical and poetic) attempts to revive the sedimented childhood experiences and to recall the forgotten free world—that has not only been lost, but has even lost its importance—by turning the gaze from outside to inside, and by leaving a free space and time for social encounters to observe reality.

By observing, we can declare the fact that the world of adulthood is the unconditional end of all freedoms. Certainly, I am not talking here about the distorted freedom—a *neutral freedom*¹⁷—that the democratic political apparatus has designed for humanity (of course not inalienable but conditional): the freedom that is summed up in free sexuality, technology, job, money, free political elections, etc. I am speaking frankly of the freedom that is not of the order of the political system's governing bodies and languages. I am speaking of a freedom that does not depend on dominant power. A freedom that does not require war and economic lobbying. A freedom not just to be alive but to live. A freedom from fear. Like the free body of a child, an inherent freedom is a "Freedom [that] is not a category of elementary life of bodies. Freedom is a category of intellectual novelty, not within, but beyond ordinary life."¹⁸

Included within this experimental book art are a number of blank—free—pages; this empty prospect is a place for the readers—the audience—to perform, to act, to participate, in other words, to choose. This is where the truth comes into play, the emergence of the truth-body in the work, in the real world, in real-time and space.



Untitled, still-life performance, 2019, photo by Kathryn Fjeld

FOR ME, ART IS THE RESULT OF A KIND OF RESTLESSNESS THAT ALWAYS CHANGES FROM ONE THING TO ANOTHER, AND EACH TIME, IN ANY FORM, CREATES ITS OWN DISCIPLINE AND SAYS EVERYTHING THAT IT HAS TO SAY REGARDLESS OF THE INTEREST OF ANY PARTICULAR PERSON OR GROUP, OR MAINSTREAM FASHION. ART IS THE ONLY POSSIBILITY THAT CAN MAKE US SEE SOMETHING THAT HAS BEEN NEARLY INVISIBLE BEFORE, AND MAKE THE IMPOSSIBLE POSSIBLE, UNUSUAL USUAL. INDEED, THE EFFECT OF THIS KIND OF ART IS LIKE CLEARING WINDOWS OR REMOVING DARK GLASSES FROM THE EYES, WHICH FREES OUR IMAGINATION AND THOUGHTS, AND EMANCIPATES OUR SENSES AND OTHER POWERS.



Untitled (self-portrait), photo-performance, 2019, photo by Niki Nikakhlagh

P-U-B-L-I-C-S-P-A-C-E

belongs to everyone and no one

“The public isn’t a fixed entity, but rather a process or mode of interaction that is available to all.”¹⁹

Let us assume P-U-B-L-I-C-S-P-A-C-E is a physical-non-physical environment that we all use in some way as a link between our private and personal spaces. In other words, it is a social architecture that connects us from one point to another, from here to there. I look at P-U-B-L-I-C-S-P-A-C-E as a connector; an opening for unknown-people with diverse social and cultural backgrounds to face each other and create a shared moment in our real lives. Such one-on-one confrontations in street-level P-U-B-L-I-C-S-P-A-C-E creates the opportunity to interrupt the passers-by from their path and throw them into an encounter with art. It involves the gazing spectator as a social actor and forces them, at that very moment, to emancipate themselves from their role as viewers and make their own decisions in relation to the artwork. This is what I believe Rancière means when he said, “[t]hat is what the word ‘emancipation’ means: the blurring of the boundary between those who act and those who look; between individuals and members of a collective body.”²⁰

Before we proceed, let us first consider two forms of encountering a work of art, a performance: *planned* and *accidental*. Sometimes we consciously plan to go and see a work of art or participate in an art event. In this state of mind, the trained part of the mind—the educated mind—is automatically activated and preparing us in advance along the way to encounter something. This is a fact. We as art audiences prepare ourselves for engaging with art. In this case, whether we participate in the artwork/performance or not, we have consciously placed ourselves as a spectator. We are prepared to use our knowledge to confront the work and to understand it, thus, arguably, our knowledge, and perhaps even our judgment, will be placed ahead of our experience of the work.

Sometimes we are faced with something unusual. We encounter it without any prior mental preparation. It is completely unexpected and accidental. It hits us in everyday moments like when we are on the way home from the supermarket. This means our feelings, our physical, bodily, experiences, form the basis of our perceptions of the work. This is in sharp contrast to the belief that the basis of our perceptions of art are the product of thoughts and certain knowledge. Our experience is visceral rather than logical. As Kester describes, “Knowledge is reliable, safe, and certain as long as it is held in mono-logical isolation and synchronic arrest.

As soon as it becomes mobilized and communicable, this certainty slips away and truth is negotiated in the gap between self and other, through an unfolding, dialogical exchange.”²¹ This type of encounter—accidental—becomes part of our life story. It occurs when our feelings, our sensations, form the basis of our perceptions of the work rather than our prepared educated mind. This very moment can be based on direct dialogue or an internal connection that will be born through the work. This spark that originates *outside* causes a self-encounter *inside*, a moment of reflection, and at the same time, a social engagement at the street level of P-U-B-L-I-C-S-P-A-C-E. “Most historical participatory art (thinking from the avant-garde to the present) has been staged within the confines of an art environment, be it a gallery, museum, or event to which visitors arrive predisposed to have an art experience or already belonging to a set of values and interests that connect them to art. While many SEA [Socially Engaged Art] projects still follow this more conservative or traditional approach, the more ambitious and risk-taking projects directly engage with the public realm—with the street—the open social space, the non-art community—a task that presents so many variables [...].”²² With this stated, I shall declare that *participation* refers to individual and/or collective behavior in the moment of confrontation with the work, and it does not necessarily imply being involved with parties, associations, institutions, or communities. “There are as many kinds of participation as are participatory projects, but nominal or symbolic interaction cannot be equated with an in-depth, long-term exchange of ideas, experiences, and collaborations, as their goals are different.”²³

“The critical moment is, precisely, the moment of the splinter, the shattering. Critical is derived, of course, from crisis. It is defined as a turning point, an interruption, a change in quality.”²⁴

Additionally, according to the *accidental encounter* mentioned above, *interruption*, in P-U-B-L-I-C-S-P-A-C-E without any prior mental preparation, allows passers-by and spectators to experience the work first, then inviting them to re-read and reflect on the work based on their own experience over time. Moreover, this strategy of art-making and presentation encourage a sense of equality and redirects power to the public. This is the philosophical concept of *emancipation*. To use the words of Jacques Rancière, “we do not have to transform spectators into actors, and ignoramus into scholars. We have to recognize the knowledge at work in the ignoramus and the activity peculiar to the spectator. Every spectator is already an actor in her story; every actor, every man of action, is the spectator of the same story.”²⁵ By presenting work in P-U-B-L-I-C-S-P-A-C-E, the audience’s experience will forge ahead of their certain knowledge and perhaps their ethical judgment. This is unlike an audience’s experience in a planned encounter with art. This altering of ‘participation’ can help us to reconsider our notions of participatory project, the performer, the audience, the public, equality, and the performance itself. Furthermore, it allows us to test any possibility of participation and flexibility that can change something of the world we live in both in the space of art and beyond it.

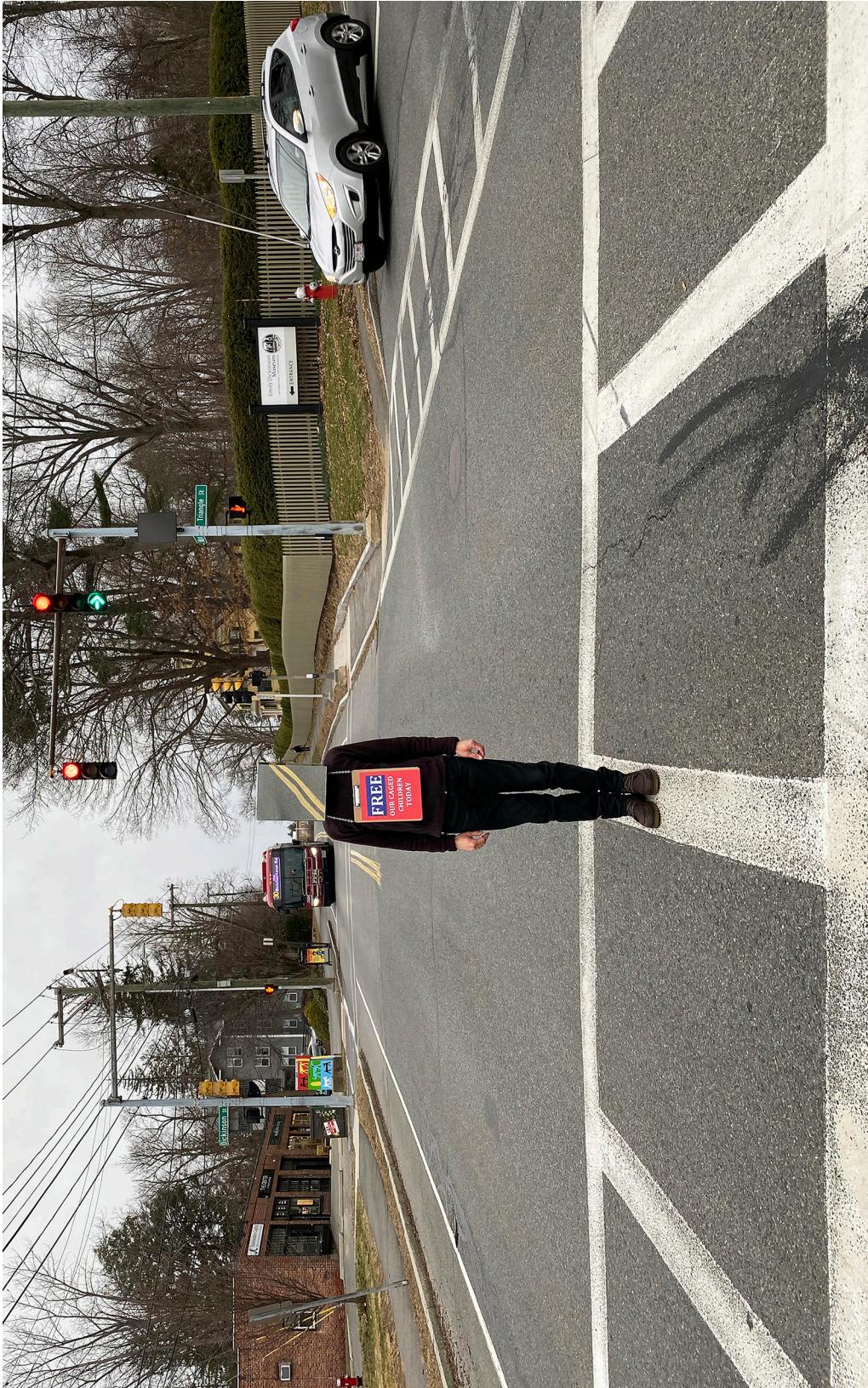
For me, situating the work in P-U-B-L-I-C-S-P-A-C-E is planting the seed that we as people

can interrupt routine and interfere with social norms and habits. This approach aims to draw people's attention to their sensitivity, responses, perspectives, and at the same time, to create another opportunity to face reality while railing against reality and letting reality seep into the artwork itself. It seems essential to bring the work of art—the power of taking action—to the street in order to reflect on ourselves and to think about who we are and how we behave, specifically now at the beginning of the entry to the post-pandemic era. I describe this as a 'critical and experiential moment' in my artistic practice to increase the presence of the audience and make a direct connection with people in P-U-B-L-I-C-S-P-A-C-E for a restricted amount of time. The work itself can serve as a mirror and leave the spectators with personal questions. It might even open another window for both of us.

P-U-B-L-I-C-S-P-A-C-E-A-N-D-T-I-M-E

"What is time? If no one asks me, I know what it is: if someone asks me, I no longer know. [...] the moment that passes between posing a question and receiving a reply is marked by both risk and possibility: the risk of doubt and uncertainty, and the possibility of an opening out to the other."²⁶

The use of P-U-B-L-I-C-S-P-A-C-E-A-N-D-T-I-M-E lets me experiment with the length and duration of the work in different ways. It also lets the audience have a different experience of the work. More importantly, the urban environment organically reflects the real speed of daily life. If the actual fast-paced nature of our lives is not visible through our body, it is, truly and automatically, moving in our mind, influencing our thoughts and our behavior. Penetrating the audience's thoughts and creating a distance, at the very heart of time, between them and the world that governs them, in reality, is essential for any possibility of change. This is integral to generating a more active type of spectatorship. These little moments have the power to turn into a gesture and underline an important part of the work. It is imperative to use P-U-B-L-I-C-S-P-A-C-E-A-N-D-T-I-M-E as a critical place to directly redirect people's awareness of socio-political issues. "The critical moment proposes a before and after or a wavering on the cusp of those two moments."²⁷ This is what art can do in the here and now: to provoke people, to raise crucial questions by engaging them. Of course, people can walk away, but how far? That's a sensational question. As Sholette would contend, "critical art is an art that aims to produce a new perception of the world, and therefore to create a commitment to its transformation. This schema, very simple in appearance, is actually the conjunction of three processes: first, the production of a sensory form of 'strangeness'; second, the development of an awareness of the reason for that strangeness and third, a mobilization of individuals as a result of that awareness."²⁸



An Image of Confusion, performance still, March 2021, photo by Kathryn Fjeld

SEMI—FINISHED PIECES

You may stand still and read this piece.

You may sit in a yoga position and read this piece.

You may remain in the position that you are already in and read this piece.

You may deny it.

You may accept it.

Yet

You have the power to burn this piece, or close it and never open it again.

When only half of the piece is made, the other half has to be completed by someone else (the audience, strangers, the police, and likely infinite possibilities). Is this not like life itself? It is life itself. Sometimes it can be more political, sometimes not. Occasionally, it could be something completely different, just like the differences between us humans and our lives. These semi-finished pieces themselves shape the aesthetics of my work. In fact, the aesthetic of my work is that it is semi-finished.

When the work is incomplete, it means that it can transform into a different thing. It can go in any direction. A semi-finished piece has the meaning of freedom and the absence of control embedded in it. At the same time, it can always maintain its freshness, whether in the most ideal, or in the most unexpected state of possibility. In any case, the important thing is that it continues on its way of becoming.

We have all experienced long road trips. As drivers, we can choose the destination and the route, and each of us may enjoy our chosen path with its scenery. We are present at every moment, every image, and above everything, we have our own story that we are following, and we are making. Now often on a long trip, an accident can change the entire course of the story. That accident is nothing but an event in the very moment, or rather it is not a pre-made scene in (our) lives, whereas we (the drivers) are those makers of the pre-determined and expected parts.

Indeed, the new experiment for me in this chapter, as I've learned, is to drive just halfway. And then, from that point onwards, I would give up the car and my role as driver to let unexpected events happen. From that moment, I would become more a participant for the rest of the way. I am not so much interested in either points A or B. I am much more interested in what is in between the two, and allowing the real moment of life—not the aesthetically reconstructed

moment—to interfere with my work and its impact. I am interested in the process. By “process” I mean “unfinished”. This is when things are not yet ready and when they are still raw and fresh. The collage of writings that constitute this work begins like this: It starts with me and ends with us. It is a series of muted images with the continuous sound of a train moving on the rails over and over, crossing our minds in every direction. It occupies a brief moment in between our birth and our death. Yes, it could begin this way, right here and now, between you and me, at the time of Covid-19.

Right now, while you are looking at these words, just know that I have no idea what I am doing. But as I imagine you are reading this piece, I invite you to imagine that I am chopping a hundred pounds of red onions.

DESCENDING

Instruction for the public:

You may take one.

DESCENDING

Durational performance

Nima Nikakhlagh

Fall 2018 (proposed)

Location involved: in front of the Metropolitan Museum, New York City, NY.

Materials: mailing envelopes, letter size printed copy papers, and my body.

Performance arrangement: a pile of mailing envelopes is placed at the bottom of the stairs of the museum. All envelopes are printed-off with the performance info at the top left corner and inside each is my written words printed on a copy paper. There is also a sign next to the pile that says: "You may take one."

Description: my action is getting to the top of the stairs, step by step, then falling my body from the top to the bottom over and over again. I will repeat this action until all envelopes are gone through the passers-by.

[illegible]

you may count the moments
you may count your breath
you may count your blinks
you may count your heartbeats
you may count your hairs
you may count your fingers
you may count your steps
you may count the man
you may count the walls, streets or stop signs
you may count the dead ends
you may count the gods
you may count the colors
you may count the rulers
you may count the right
you may count the left
you may count the political prisoners
you may count 12345678987654321
you may count the injured
you may count the killed
you may count the refugees
you may count the peas
you may count peace
you may count senses
you may count nonsenses
you may count the rich
you may count the broken bones
you may count the stairs
you may go to the stars

I thought that only artless people die
but the truth is something else

Yes, it could begin this way, repeated from story to story, building to building, street to street.

He has two antagonists: The first pushes him from behind, from his origin. The second blocks his road ahead. He struggles with both. Actually the first supports him in his struggle with the second, for the first wants to push him forward; and in the same way the second supports him in his struggle with the first; for the second of course forces him back. But it is only theoretically so. For it is not only the two protagonists who are there, but he himself as well, and who really knows his intentions? However that may be, he has a dream that sometime in an unguarded moment – it would require, though, a night as dark as no night has ever been – he will spring out of the fighting line and be promoted, on account of his experience of such warfare, as judge over his struggling antagonist.²⁹

I'LL DANCE WITH YOU IN THE WIND

Instruction for the public:

Take your individual flag.

Write your words.

Hang your written flag on the wall.

My shirt is a flag of freedom
fluttering on the clothesline;
light and liberated
From the body's bondage.³⁰

I'll dance with you in the wind

Public art installation-performance

Nima Nikakhlagh

Fall 2018 (proposed)

I'll dance with you in the wind is an interactive campus-wide installation that aims to send a message of peace and unification in a contentious time. It begins with 195 white (blank) sheets, hung on trees around campus. The 195 sheets represent the 195 nations of the world. The white sheets (blank "Country Flags"), initially both a blank canvas and a sign of solidarity and similarity, will fill slowly with the words and messages of our classmates and community members as the installation progresses. This work will be paired with a piece inside Herter Art Gallery. Visitors will be encouraged to write their own message on small sheets (blank "Individual Flags") in the gallery. At the end of each day, the artist will collect the sheets from the gallery and install them on the trees. As the trees start to fill with these *Individual Flags*, individual messages will start to blur. What will result will be a unified message of campus-wide solidarity. We will come together, and we will affect change through communication. While each of our messages is different, we as a whole represent one community, one nation—one Earth.

The space in which this installation will exist, and the time during which it will exist, both play an important role in the work. A university is a place for freedom of speech, a place for the free expression of new ideas, a place of research, and a place where young minds go to learn how to think deeply and engage with the world. As such, it is particularly important to create a space for these voices to freely express themselves within the open space of the campus. The project is a kind of Guerrilla publishing piece, in which all those who choose to, can see their statements released for community consumption.

The hope is the piece will foster dialogue and raise essential questions, and that the blank canvases — Country Flags—will create a space for statements that visitors may be afraid to make in more academic settings. The timing of the piece is particularly important. The piece will be installed on November 5th and 6th, the day before and the day of the mid-term elections. The gallery opening is on the day after Election Day. Two years ago, at this time, many Americans felt like their voices hadn't been heard. The hope is that on the day following Election Day and the days after, this piece will serve as a reminder that individual voices matter, and that our strength is most apparent when we join our voices as one.

As with anything released to the public, there is the hope that the focus will be on positivity and respect, but we cannot ever fully control the actions of others. In order to eliminate the possibilities of hate speech entering the project either through interaction with the work in the gallery or through vandalism of the hanging Country Flags, the artist—against the intention of the piece and solely due to university policy—will run regular checks of the written contributions. The first check will come as the artist gathers the work from the gallery. Any Individual Flag containing hate speech will not be installed. The second check will come as the artist regularly walks the installation throughout the duration of the project. Any vandalized flag will be removed as soon as possible to discourage viewers from writing on them in any space outside of the gallery. The classmates of the artist will assist in the regular checks, and other responsible community members will be enlisted as well.

I'll dance with you in the wind
Grad Exhibition Herter Art Gallery
Opening Wednesday, November 7th
Show closes November 28th

Description letter to UMass Public Art Committee (UPAC) for safety purposes:

1- I'm going to hang 195 white (blank) sheets of fabric on trees ("Country Flags" with dimension 3 by 5 Feet) throughout campus. None of these flags will be touching the sidewalk or in the path of pedestrians in any way nor will the flags block their vision. I'll choose trees which are located in the field or around the pond as well. Also, these flags will not be hung on high branches. Since there are so many trees throughout campus, I will pick short branches to be safe and easy to install and de-install. I'm going to punch the top corners of the flags and install them to the branches using zip ties.

Dates: install—November 5th and 6th

2- Additionally, I'll install 195 small blank pieces of fabric ("Individual Flags") inside the gallery that are removable, and some markers next to it as well.

3- One of the small pieces out of 195 will be already marked by me (My Individual Flag), and all of the rest of them are blank. I'll ask viewers during the show to make their own "Individual Flag" on each small removable-sheet through my statement on the wall.

4- At the end of each day of the exhibition, I will take out all "Individual Flags" that are marked by viewers in the gallery, and attach them to the blank "Country flags" which are dancing throughout the campus in the wind.

5- I'll de-install all flags when the show closes.

Dates: de-install—November 29/30th

we
you and I
are
here
right now
in this space
together
not to be
cold
to release our own voice
not to be
still
to do our own act
just
to be
free
freedom
freedom from
freedom to
freedom for
here or there
right
now
you and i
we

Each of us can make a statement on any of these blank sheets
then
I'll dance with you in the wind.

I'll dance with you in the wind (Individual Flag), image-text, 2018

Hi, I'm Niki and am going to tell you a story about my dad, me, and a whole lot of trees. I remember it like it was yesterday. Me and my dad were walking on the property of UMass. It was boring at first, but then it got fun, really fun. My dad was preparing for an art project. I was very excited for my dad. He was too. He was also a little bit nervous. I believed in him. And I still do. Our job for that day was to look for trees with low and strong branches to hang white (or as my dad says colorless) pieces of fabric on. We were looking for one-hundred and ninety-four trees. We found and marked all of them. Can you believe it? You can probably imagine how long that took. We started Saturday morning and looked all day. We also looked a little on Sunday morning. I got to mark down trees on the map that he drew. He's a good drawer, but he always says that he is not. As I said, it was really fun. I remember as my dad was working hard, I was thinking about which trees were good climbing trees. I also ran around the trees, a lot. Oh, also I secretly climbed some of the trees, and sometimes I went pretty high. Hey, what do you expect, I was eight. Wait, is it no longer a secret because I told you? Anyway, sadly my dad's project was rejected so who cares if the whole world finds out. Those were two fun days. I never thought looking at trees would be so cool. There were so many different sizes and shapes. And they had names, too. People actually named the trees. Not names like Niki or Nima, or Oliva or Albert, but something like Katsura trees, Paper Birch, Green Ash, Black Tupelo, White Oak, Red Oak, and so on. It was awesome and interesting to look at their names and differences. I got to spend a whole day with my dad, and I'm pretty sure that was my favorite part. I am usually at school or busy doing homework or playing with my friends, and my dad would be at his school or he would be doing his homework, and we didn't usually spend full days together. It was so nice spending some time with him and the trees. Plus, whenever I'm working on a project, he always helps me, so I decided to help him. But let me tell you, at the end of the day, my legs were on fire, and my mouth and lungs hurt because of how much I laughed and smiled. That was one of the best days ever.

Yes, we were walking around in a very, very, very large, seemingly public space, counting and marking the trees in the yard of a very, very, very large public school (in higher level education), but essentially private—not owned by the people but owned by the government of the people—and we were optimistic that we have some rights as people too. We thought we are allowed to make socially engaged art with the permission of our school principals. We thought we had the right to hang a colorless (white) and also weightless cloth from the sturdy arms of the trees for several days and let them dance freely in the wind. We thought this was the land of all freedom, a free country with free people. We thought we stepped on the land where their children are said to be the freest children ever in the world, which is the truth, but we didn't know that the same children will never be free when they become adults. We thought our schools – here – are, of course, political but free space to study, research, experience, experiment, learn and grow. We thought so.

We thought we could create works of art for everyone in this so-called democratic educational space. We thought we could—BE REVOLUTIONARY—as its life-sized billboards suggest. We thought we could encourage us to see each other's point of view through aesthetic education and to treat our fellow subjects not as means to an end, but as equal speakers. We thought we could make something like a poetry-performance with/for our community: What if we would let our sheets, our canvas fabrics, our body clothes, our papers, dance freely in the wind? What if we could write some words for each other on each other's sheets, on each other's canvas, on each other's body, on each other's notebooks? What if we were allowed to read each other's words freely? What if we freely criticized each other out loud under the shade of a tree? Incidentally, this is the most peaceful form of dialogue. Why should we always fight with each other? Why should we have to meet two dozen principles and committees to get permission to hang some simple clothes from trees at our school? Basically, why should we ask for permission concerning the safest poetic act in the world? (And yet be censored.) Why should we have to go to court, formally or informally, to defend our simple rights and perhaps for everything, our ideas, our thoughts, our beliefs, and our freedom against them all? Why should everything be political to the point of death?

I was stupidly optimistic. I applied for the Master of Fine Arts Program in Studio Arts, as an artist, in order to learn by doing, and was accepted. That meant I must make things and learn from them. But the reality is something else. I am left with unanswered questions and thousands of dollars debt to the Federal government as a graduate student of art. It is my reality, reality. It is a real political issue for young people who are no longer free. I am—we are—not allowed as graduate students in the department of art to do my—our—research practically by making art beyond the four walls of the classroom and sharing it with other students, faculty, and the public to learn from this direct mutual dialogue. Are we allowed? Why are we not allowed to see our words dance in the wind, in the proximity of the trees like a living sculpture in public space? Why not? It is my understanding that the university provides—all universities provide—the forum for public art expression by offering a process for approval of public art installations. Is that not the case? The answer is like the final scene of a tragic play: none of the two dozen principles who interrogated me answered my last questions and still remain silent in their position of power.

11/8/2020

UMass Amherst Mail - General Work Request Confirmation



Nima Nikakhlagh <nnikakhlagh@umass.edu>

General Work Request Confirmation

Facilities & Campus Services via A F S Webforms <afsweb@admin.umass.edu>
Reply-To: Facilities & Campus Services <servdesk@facil.umass.edu>
To: nnikakhlagh@umass.edu

Wed, Oct 3, 2018 at 12:10 AM

We have received your general work request submitted on Wednesday, October 3, 2018 - 00:10 by Anonymous. Here are the details of your submission.

-- Requester Information --

Full Name: NIMA NIKAKHLAGH
Department: Department of the Arts
Email: nnikakhlagh@umass.edu
Phone: 5104178759

-- Work Request --

Type of Request: Other
Building Requiring Work: Various outdoor locations on campus
Room #: N/A
Describe Work Requested: Public Art Installation

<https://mail.google.com/mail/u/0?ik=e39c0a3323&view=pt&search=all&permmsgid=msg-f%3A1613275925073097721&simpl=msg-f%3A16132759250...> 1/1

I'll dance with you in the wind (documentation #1), image-text, 2020

11/8/2020

UMass Amherst Mail - FW: Art Installation questions - WReq Entry for Various outdoor locations on campus on Wednesday, October 3, 2...



Nima Nikakhlagh <nnikakhlagh@umass.edu>

FW: Art Installation questions - WReq Entry for Various outdoor locations on campus on Wednesday, October 3, 2018 - 00:10

Liz Tousignant <ltousignant@facil.umass.edu>
To: Nima Nikakhlagh <nnikakhlagh@umass.edu>

Fri, Oct 5, 2018 at 9:53 AM

Good morning Nima,

Physical Plant received your request for an installation of a Public Art display.

There is a committee that works with artists (student, faculty, community) that want to display art on campus. It is called the University Public Arts Council. You will need to present your art in front of the committee and to do that you will need to contact Marty Smith. You can reach her at mbsmith@facil.umass.edu. They only meet once a month so I suggest you email her soon to get on the agenda for the next meeting.

Sincerely,

Liz Tousignant

Liz Tousignant

Special Projects Customer Service Representative

Facilities & Campus Services

University of Massachusetts

[360 Campus Center Way](#)

[Amherst, MA 01003](#)

413-577-0413 (voice)

413-204-2650 (cell)

413-545-2690 (fax)

ltousignant@facil.umass.edu

www.umass.edu/facilities



****Please note my working hours are 6:00 a.m. – 2:00 p.m. If you are in need of event assistance and it is after 2:00 p.m., please call 545-6401 (the Solution Center). ****

<https://mail.google.com/mail/u/0?ik=e39c0a3323&view=pt&search=all&permmsgid=msg-f%3A1613493841166246599&simpl=msg-f%3A16134938411...> 1/3

I'll dance with you in the wind (documentation #2), image-text, 2020

11/8/2020

UMass Amherst Mail - 'Public Art Installation'



Nima Nikakhlagh <nnikakhlagh@umass.edu>

'Public Art Installation'

Nima Nikakhlagh <nnikakhlagh@umass.edu>
To: mbsmith@facil.umass.edu

Fri, Oct 5, 2018 at 12:07 PM

Hello Dear Marty Smith,

I, Nima Nikakhlagh, am a new graduate student in Studio Art program. I have recently sent a request to Physical Plant for an installation of a Public Art display. According to the response from Liz Tousignant who is Special Project Customer Service Representative, I will need to present my art in front of the committee. Hereby, I'm requesting to get on the agenda for the next meeting.

I would like to let you know that there is a Graduate Group Exhibition opening on November 7th, and I'm hoping that I have a chance to present my work in the next committee meeting to be able to install my art for the show.

Looking forward to hearing from you soon.

I appreciate your time and consideration.

Best regards,
Nima

<https://mail.google.com/mail/u/0?ik=e39c0a3323&view=pt&search=all&permmsgid=msg-f%3A1613502252763984167&simpl=msg-f%3A16135022527...> 1/1

I'll dance with you in the wind (documentation #3), image-text, 2020

11/8/2020

UMass Amherst Mail - 'Public Art Installation'



Nima Nikakhlagh <nnikakhlagh@umass.edu>

'Public Art Installation'

Marty Smith <mbsmith@facil.umass.edu>
To: Nima Nikakhlagh <nnikakhlagh@umass.edu>

Fri, Oct 5, 2018 at 12:10 PM

Nima,

Please send me your proposal. The next meeting is next Friday. You and I may need to meet before the meeting to review and revise details.

Marty

M. Blakey Smith AIA
Project Executive, A/E Design

Design & Construction Management

A division of Facilities & Campus Services
University of Massachusetts
360 Campus Center Way
Amherst, MA 01003
mbsmith@facil.umass.edu
413.545.6496
www.umass.edu/dcm/

We are here to help.
[Quoted text hidden]

<https://mail.google.com/mail/u/0/?ik=e39c0a3323&view=pt&search=all&permmsgid=msg-f%3A1613502428966972273&simpl=msg-f%3A16135024289...> 1/1

I'll dance with you in the wind (documentation #4), image-text, 2020

11/8/2020

UMass Amherst Mail - 'Public Art Installation'



Nima Nikakhlagh <nnikakhlagh@umass.edu>

'Public Art Installation'

Marty Smith <mbsmith@facil.umass.edu>
To: Nima Nikakhlagh <nnikakhlagh@umass.edu>

Fri, Oct 5, 2018 at 1:03 PM

Nima,

I reviewed your proposal with Pam Monn of Grounds and we need some additional information for your presentation next Friday.

1. You need a plan showing where you intend to install this. You can use the tree map at gis.umass.edu which shows all of the trees and their sizes and names.
2. How are you going to physically install these? Your flags are 5' tall so you must be hanging them at least at 7' or higher. Are you using a ladder?
3. To protect the trees, you will have to hang these flags on branches which are a minimum 1" diameter thick and you will need to protect the bark of the branches from abrading using something like sections of pool noodles around the branch under the zip ties.
4. There is no release form, you will be responsible for installation and removal of the project and any damage to the trees.

If you would like to meet with Pam and I, please call me to make an appointment. In any event, please call me next week to confirm that you will be attending the UPAC meeting Friday.

marty

M. Blakey Smith AIA
Project Executive, A/E Design

Design & Construction Management

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University of Massachusetts
360 Campus Center Way
Amherst, MA 01003
mbsmith@facil.umass.edu
413.545.6496
www.umass.edu/dcm/

We are here to help.

-----Original Message-----

From: Nima Nikakhlagh <nnikakhlagh@umass.edu>
Sent: Friday, October 5, 2018 12:42 PM
To: Marty Smith <mbsmith@facil.umass.edu>
Subject: RE: 'Public Art Installation'

On 2018-10-05 12:10, Marty Smith wrote:

> Nima,

>

> Please send me your proposal. The next meeting is next Friday. You

<https://mail.google.com/mail/u/0/?ik=e39c0a3323&view=pt&search=all&permmsgid=msg-f%3A1613505785250259071&dsqt=1&simpl=msg-f%3A1613...> 1/2

I'll dance with you in the wind (documentation #5), image-text, 2020

UMass Amherst Mail - 'Public Art Installation' - Statement-



Marty Smith <mbsmith@facil.umass.edu>
To: Nima Nikakhlagh <nnikakhlagh@umass.edu>

Fri, Oct 12, 2018 at 8:34 AM

Really nice job and I like the new title. The 's' on Whites really bothered me because of the KKK connotation. I grew up in the South and for me white sheets represent the KKK and the 's' somehow intensified the connection.

Marty

From: Nima Nikakhlagh <nnikakhlagh@umass.edu>
Sent: Friday, October 12, 2018 3:32 AM
To: Marty Smith <mbsmith@facil.umass.edu>
Subject: 'Public Art Installation' - Statement-

Attached is my statement of the work, and I tried to answer all questions by writing this statement as well. I'll bring some hard copy with my self to the meeting in order to make everything clear and acceptable. I hope that I can meet the committee's satisfaction.

Best,
Nima

I'll dance with you in the wind (documentation #6), image-text, 2020

11/8/2020

UMass Amherst Mail - 'Public Art Installation' - Statement-



Nima Nikakhlagh <nnikakhlagh@umass.edu>

'Public Art Installation' - Statement-

Nima Nikakhlagh <nnikakhlagh@umass.edu>
To: Marty Smith <mbsmith@facil.umass.edu>

Fri, Oct 12, 2018 at 11:12 PM

[Quoted text hidden]

Dear Marty,

I wanted to thank you for your huge support. No doubt without your help I would not have made it.

You don't know how happy I am that the committee approved my project. Really hope that this project is a success.

Enjoy your retirement. I'm sure you will be missed.

Thanks again,
Nima

<https://mail.google.com/mail/u/0?ik=e39c0a3323&view=pt&search=all&permmsgid=msg-f%3A1614178261342879492&simpl=msg-f%3A16141782613...> 1/1

I'll dance with you in the wind (documentation #7), image-text, 2020

11/8/2020

UMass Amherst Mail - Arboretum Committee



Nima Nikakhlagh <nnikakhlagh@umass.edu>

Arboretum Committee

Jack Ahern <jfa@ipo.umass.edu>

Sat, Oct 13, 2018 at 3:42 PM

To: Nima Nikakhlagh <nnikakhlagh@umass.edu>, Brady Yacek <byacek@facil.umass.edu>

Dear Nima

The arboretum committee will be pleased to discuss your project at our next meeting, 10/23 at 11:30 in room 314 of the Design Building.

Please confirm if you can make this date. I will distribute your project summary and we should be able to review your project in the first 15minutesof the meeting.

Jack Ahern

Chair Arboretum Committee

Jack Ahern, Ph.D., FASLA, FCELA

Professor of Landscape Architecture

University of Massachusetts Amherst

<https://mail.google.com/mail/u/0?ik=e39c0a3323&view=pt&search=all&permmsgid=msg-f%3A1614240515091423970&simpl=msg-f%3A16142405150...> 1/1

I'll dance with you in the wind (documentation #8), image-text, 2020

11/8/2020

UMass Amherst Mail - Arboretum Committee



Nima Nikakhlagh <nnikakhlagh@umass.edu>

Arboretum Committee

Nima Nikakhlagh <nnikakhlagh@umass.edu>
To: Jack Ahern <jfa@ipo.umass.edu>

Sun, Oct 14, 2018 at 12:27 PM

[Quoted text hidden]

Dear Ahern,

Thanks for writing. The meeting's date and time work for me.
It's my pleasure to be there and discuss about the project.

Looking forward to meeting you.

Best regards,
Nima

<https://mail.google.com/mail/u/0?ik=e39c0a3323&view=pt&search=all&permmsgid=msg-f%3A1614318883860531607&simpl=msg-f%3A16143188838...> 1/1

I'll dance with you in the wind (documentation #9), image-text, 2020

11/8/2020

UMass Amherst Mail - Arboretum Committee



Nima Nikakhlagh <nnikakhlagh@umass.edu>

Arboretum Committee

Nima Nikakhlagh <nnikakhlagh@umass.edu>
To: Jack Ahern <jfa@ipo.umass.edu>

Fri, Oct 26, 2018 at 9:38 AM

On 2018-10-13 15:42, Jack Ahern wrote:

[Quoted text hidden]

Dear Jack,

Thank you again for having met with me (and my daughter).
I know that you and your committee gave your go-ahead to my project during our meeting, but could you please send to me that response electronically?

Best regards,
Nima

<https://mail.google.com/mail/u/0?ik=e39c0a3323&view=pt&search=all&permmsgid=msg-f%3A1615395401613423946&simpl=msg-f%3A16153954016...> 1/1

I'll dance with you in the wind (documentation #10), image-text, 2020

11/8/2020

UMass Amherst Mail - Art installation Follow Up - Important!



Nima Nikakhlagh <nnikakhlagh@umass.edu>

Art installation Follow Up - Important!

Marty Smith <mbsmith@facil.umass.edu>

Fri, Oct 19, 2018 at 9:30 AM

To: Nima Nikakhlagh <nnikakhlagh@umass.edu>

Cc: Simon Raine <sraine@facil.umass.edu>, Richard Yeager <ryeager@umass.edu>, Shane Conklin <sconklin@admin.umass.edu>, Jane Welsted <welsted@admin.umass.edu>

Nima,

The Associate Vice Chancellor of Facilities and Campus Services has requested to meet with you, your Faculty Advisor, and Anna Branch, Associate Chancellor Equity and Inclusion as soon as possible. Please contact Ms. Jane Welsted at 545-3136 or welsted@admin.umass.edu to schedule this meeting for today or early next week.

Marty

M. Blakey Smith AIA
Project Executive, A/E Design

Design & Construction Management

A division of Facilities & Campus Services

University of Massachusetts

[360 Campus Center Way](#)

[Amherst, MA 01003](#)

mbsmith@facil.umass.edu

413.545.6496

www.umass.edu/dcm/



We are here to help.

<https://mail.google.com/mail/u/0?ik=e39c0a3323&view=pt&search=all&permmsgid=msg-f%3A1614760699283183655&simpl=msg-f%3A16147606992...> 1/2

I'll dance with you in the wind (documentation #11), image-text, 2020

11/8/2020

UMass Amherst Mail - Student Art Project



Nima Nikakhlagh <nnikakhlagh@umass.edu>

Student Art Project

Shane Conklin <sconklin@admin.umass.edu>

Mon, Oct 22, 2018 at 11:36 AM

To: Simon Raine <sraine@facil.umass.edu>, Marty Smith <mbsmith@facil.umass.edu>, Richard Yeager <ryeager@umass.edu>, Anna Branch <ebranch@umass.edu>, Nima Nikakhlagh <nnikakhlagh@umass.edu>, Young Min Moon <ymoon@art.umass.edu>

Shane wants this meeting to occur ASAP.

-Jane

 **invite.ics**
3K

<https://mail.google.com/mail/u/0?ik=e39c0a3323&view=pt&search=all&permmsgid=msg-f%3A1615040467032636996&simpl=msg-f%3A16150404670...> 1/1

I'll dance with you in the wind (documentation #12), image-text, 2020

11/8/2020

UMass Amherst Mail - Art Installation request



Nima Nikakhlagh <nnikakhlagh@umass.edu>

Art Installation request

Shane Conklin <sconklin@admin.umass.edu>
To: Nima Nikakhlagh <nnikakhlagh@umass.edu>
Cc: Susan Jahoda <sej@art.umass.edu>

Fri, Oct 26, 2018 at 8:50 AM

Dear Nima,

Thank you for your request to display your art on trees throughout campus. I regret that we must deny permission for the display, as the University has not designated trees throughout the campus as a public forum for private expression.

We appreciate the thought you put into the project and the time you spent with us in regards to your plan.

Thanks.

Shane Conklin
Associate Vice Chancellor
Facilities & Campus Services

<https://mail.google.com/mail/u/0?ik=e39c0a3323&view=pt&search=all&permmsgid=msg-f%3A1615392357605975428&simpl=msg-f%3A16153923576...> 1/1

I'll dance with you in the wind (documentation #13), image-text, 2020

11/8/2020

UMass Amherst Mail - Art Installation request



Nima Nikakhlagh <nnikakhlagh@umass.edu>

Art Installation request

Nima Nikakhlagh <nnikakhlagh@umass.edu>
To: Shane Conklin <sconklin@admin.umass.edu>

Fri, Oct 26, 2018 at 10:08 AM

[Quoted text hidden]

Dear Shane,

Thank you for your response.

While I'm not surprised, based upon our discussion during our meeting, that you denied my project request, I am surprised that the reasons stated here (trees/private expression) were never mentioned at that time. Nor were any alternatives in regard to trees used for private expression requested or offered during our meeting. Incidentally my project did receive approval from the Arboretum Committee.

It is my understanding that the University provides - all universities provide - the forum for public art expression by offering a process for approval of public art installations. Is that not the case?

I appreciate the thought you put into your decision and the time you took to meet with me.

Best regards,
Nima

<https://mail.google.com/mail/u/0?ik=e39c0a3323&view=pt&search=all&permmsgid=msg-f%3A1615397316867783203&simpl=msg-f%3A16153973168...> 1/1

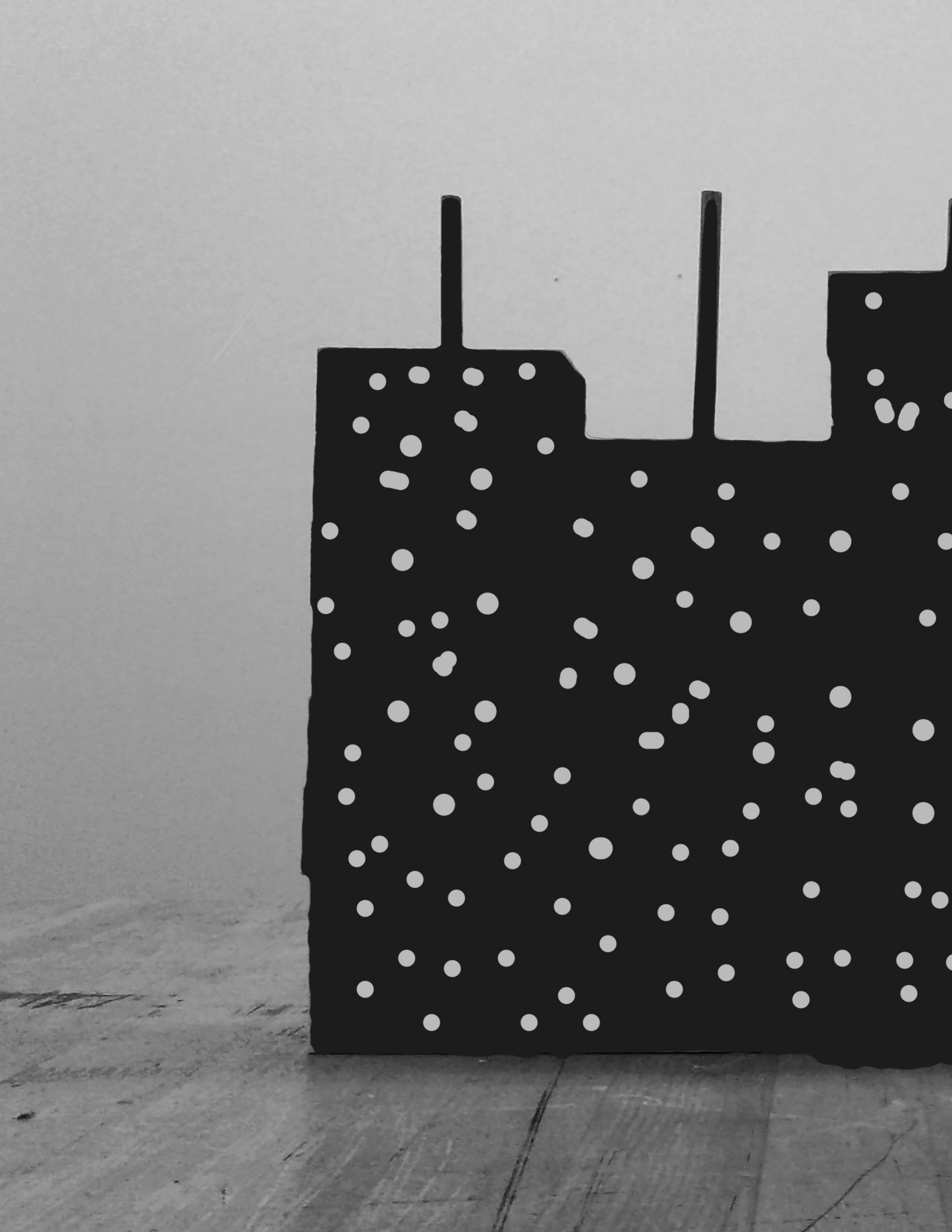
I'll dance with you in the wind (documentation #14), image-text, 2020

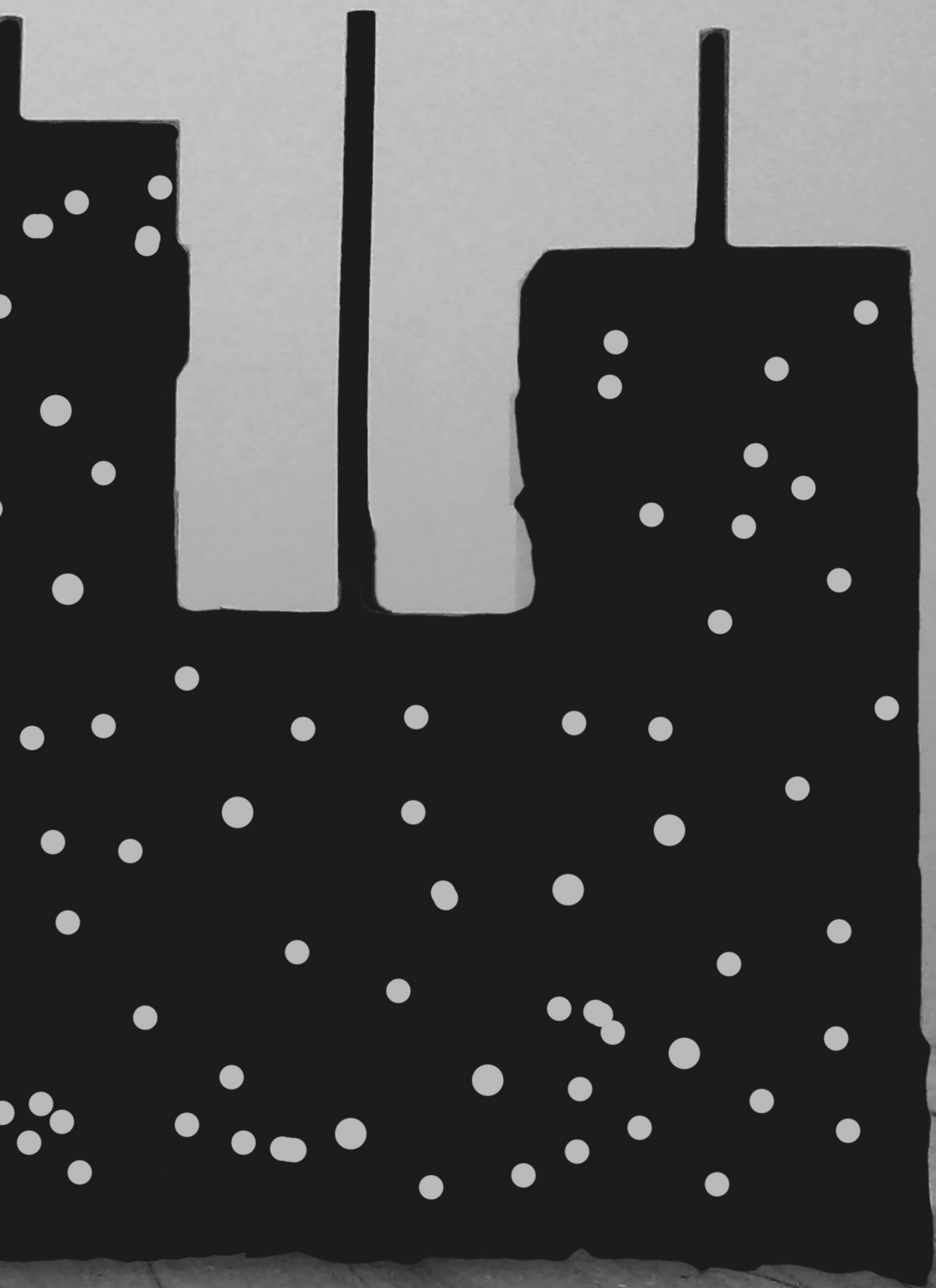
It is my understanding that the university provides—all universities provide—the forum for public art expression by offering a process for approval of public art installations. Is that not the case?

In a lecture at Amherst College in 1963, [JF]Kennedy celebrated the artist as “the last champion of the individual mind and sensibility against an intrusive society and an officious state.” Rather than the state dictating to the artist, the artist would educate the state, by acting as an independent, willfully individual voice of conscience (“If sometimes our great artists have been the most critical of society, it is because their sensitivity and their concern of justice...makes[theartist]awarethatour Nationfalls shortofits highestpotential”).³¹

COLLAPSE

another failure





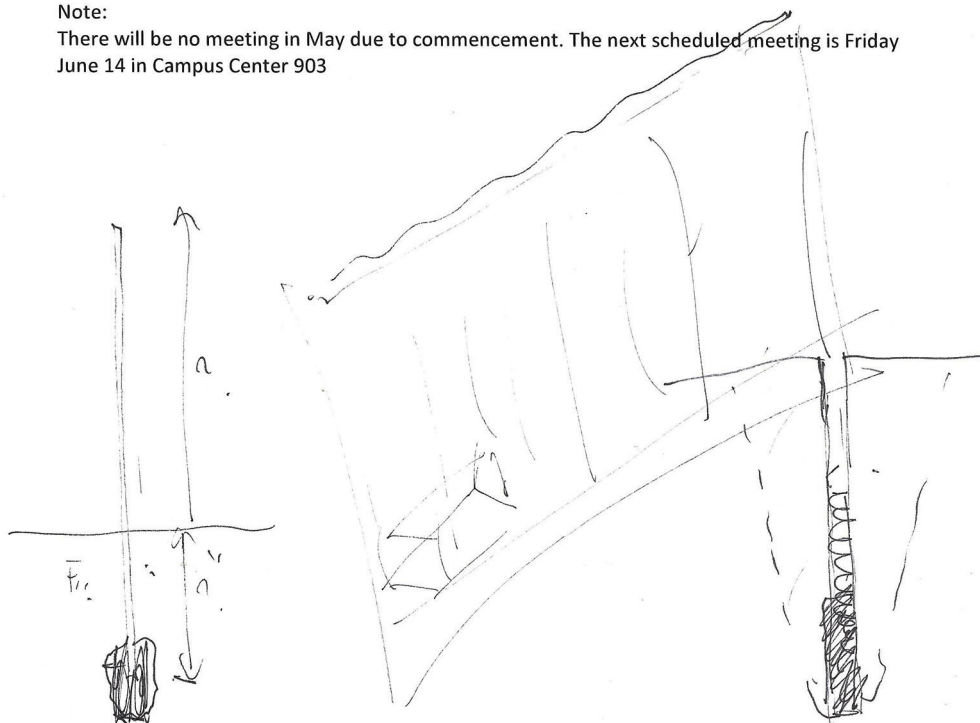
University Public Art Committee
Friday April 12, 2019
Campus Center Room 903
1:00am – 2:30pm

Agenda

- | | |
|---|-----------------|
| 1. Introductions | Richard Yeager |
| 2. Collapse (Student public Art Installation) | Nima Nikakhlagh |
| 3. Members Time | Members |

Note:

There will be no meeting in May due to commencement. The next scheduled meeting is Friday June 14 in Campus Center 903



Collapse (Agenda), image-text, print on paper, 8.5 x 11, 2019

Collapse

Sculptural installation-performance

Nima Nikakhlagh

April 2019 (proposed)

Location involved: Haigis Mall, Fine Arts Center

Collapse is a sculptural installation using the following materials: cardboard boxes, reinforced metal rods (rebar) and concrete. The idea is to have an initial sculpture of a wall, 16 feet wide, 11 feet high, and 2 feet deep, made of cardboard boxes that, after a transition, reveals a secondary sculpture made of rebar. The rebar sculpture serves as a sort of skeleton first supporting the initial sculpture, and later containing the remains of that sculpture after its transition.

The installation concerns itself with structure, permanence, erosion, what is seen, what is unseen, what is revealed by outside forces, uncertainty, decay, and transformation; it is traditional-sculpture meets Happening. This piece will intentionally deteriorate as a result of long-term exposure to the elements—the deterioration is the transition from the first sculpture to the second. Ideally the duration of the installation will be at least 15 days up to as much as four weeks depending on the weather. The goal is for the materials to be exposed naturally to rain that will break down cardboard, ultimately revealing the underlying structural supports. It's the presence of this support that will keep the installation safe for the public as it contains the other materials as they collapse.

Aesthetically, the proposed project, as a live performance included performative installation-sculpture, is a process of "object-making—object-breaking" with a different concept. Conceptually, this work has many possible interpretations, but all involve uncertainty and transformation. Some power acts and affects over time; what this power is and what is acted upon could be any number of things (political will, war, security, climate change, immigrants, etc.).

Prior to construction of the piece, I've decided to take all the cardboard boxes into the public space over time, and ask people of various ages to write on the boxes, freely, some words about what life means to them. Then I will use those boxes—art objects—as a result of my interaction with people, to make the installation in the public space. Moreover, intentionally I want to make (build) and break the body of the sculpture in the real world, for the public, allowing the whole process of the work to be seen by viewers-participants in different ways. And finally, the sculpture will be transformed by the elements (collapsed), disassembled (destroyed), and collected as garbage to be taken to the junk yard; this destruction and removal will be included as part of the piece.



UNIVERSITY OF MASSACHUSETTS
AMHERST

Department of Art
128 Studio Arts Building
110 Thatcher Road
Amherst, MA 01003-9330

March 24, 2019

Professor Sergio Breña
Department of Civil and Environmental Engineering

Re: Nima Nikaklagh, public art project

Dear Professor Breña,

I hope all is well with you. As Graduate Program Director in the Department of Art, I am writing to introduce a graduate student Nima Nikaklagh, who is seeking your help in constructing his large-scale outdoor project. The project is entitled *Collapse*, to be built at Haigis Mall, Fine Arts Center, in April 2019. Nima and I ask you to please offer him some insights and expertise to materialize his project.

Joining the MFA program in art in fall 2018, Nima is an Iranian-born artist who came to the US as a refugee. Born just two weeks before the outbreak of the Iran-Iraq War, his childhood experience of growing up during and after the eight-year war has made a profound impact on his worldview and his position as an artist. Although his work does not directly allude to or represent any images of war or even death, it may be safe to say that his art is a form of *working through* the physical and psychological traumas of the Iran-Iraq War.

Nima's work usually involves some form of audience participation as viewer-participants. Departing from making traditional art object, his work involves using the body both as subject and object. Nima draws from avant-garde tradition of Fluxus and Happenings, as well as various theatre techniques. An extensive traveler, Nima's work bears a strong urgency in the political climate today. His work explores ways to induce the viewers to reconsider freedom and humanity, in light of violence and terror in the world.

The proposed project *Collapse* entails a construction of cardboard boxes with rebar and concrete structure inside that will be exposed after the boxes eventually erode and collapse under the weather. At 15 feet wide and 10 feet tall, erected in public space, the boxes may recall Trump's wall in the southern border. The contrast between soft cover

Collapse (documentation of support), image-text, 2019

to be eroded and the rigid structure that will be revealed may connote the harsh realities and uncertainties that migrants are facing. Or, seen positively, the firm underlying structure could be symbolic of certain values that will not wither away in an age of tyranny and alternative facts. This is just one possible interpretation of the work, as the project is open to other readings. I envision that the piece will be an example of Nima's powerful imagination that implicates his viewers.

Nima is a promising artist who is very deeply engaged with his work. With his unique life experiences and insights Nima has been contributing to the program in significant ways. He is a recipient of Research Enhancement and Leadership Fellowship awarded by Graduate School. I ask you to please honor Nima's aspirations by supporting his endeavors. I am available for any questions you may have. Thank you very much for your considerations.

Respectfully submitted,

Young Min Moon
Professor / Graduate Program Director
Department of Art
UMass Amherst
ymoon@art.umass.edu
577-0624

Wind Force

Analysis based on ASCE 7-10

- $F = q_h G C_f A \Rightarrow$ Design wind force
- $q_h = 0.00256 K_z K_{zt} K_d V^2 \Rightarrow$ Velocity pressure
- For risk category I and exposure B
 - $K_z = 0.57$
 - $K_{zt} = 1$
 - $K_d = 0.85$
 - $V = 107 \text{ mph}$
 - $G = 1$
 - $C_f = 1.425$

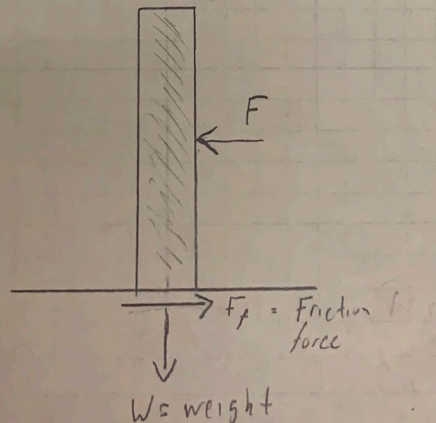
$$q_h = 0.00256(0.57)(1)(0.85)(107)^2$$

$$= 14.2 \frac{\text{lb}}{\text{ft}^2}$$

$$F = 14.2(1)(1.425)(16)(11)$$

$$= 3562 \text{ lb}$$

Free body diagram



$$F_f = M W$$

$$= 0.3(150)\left(\frac{16}{12}\right)\left(\frac{16}{12}\right)(2)(24)$$

$$= 3840 \text{ lb}$$

$$F_f > F \therefore \text{OK}$$

Cardboard boxes strength must be verified

MINIMUM DESIGN LOADS

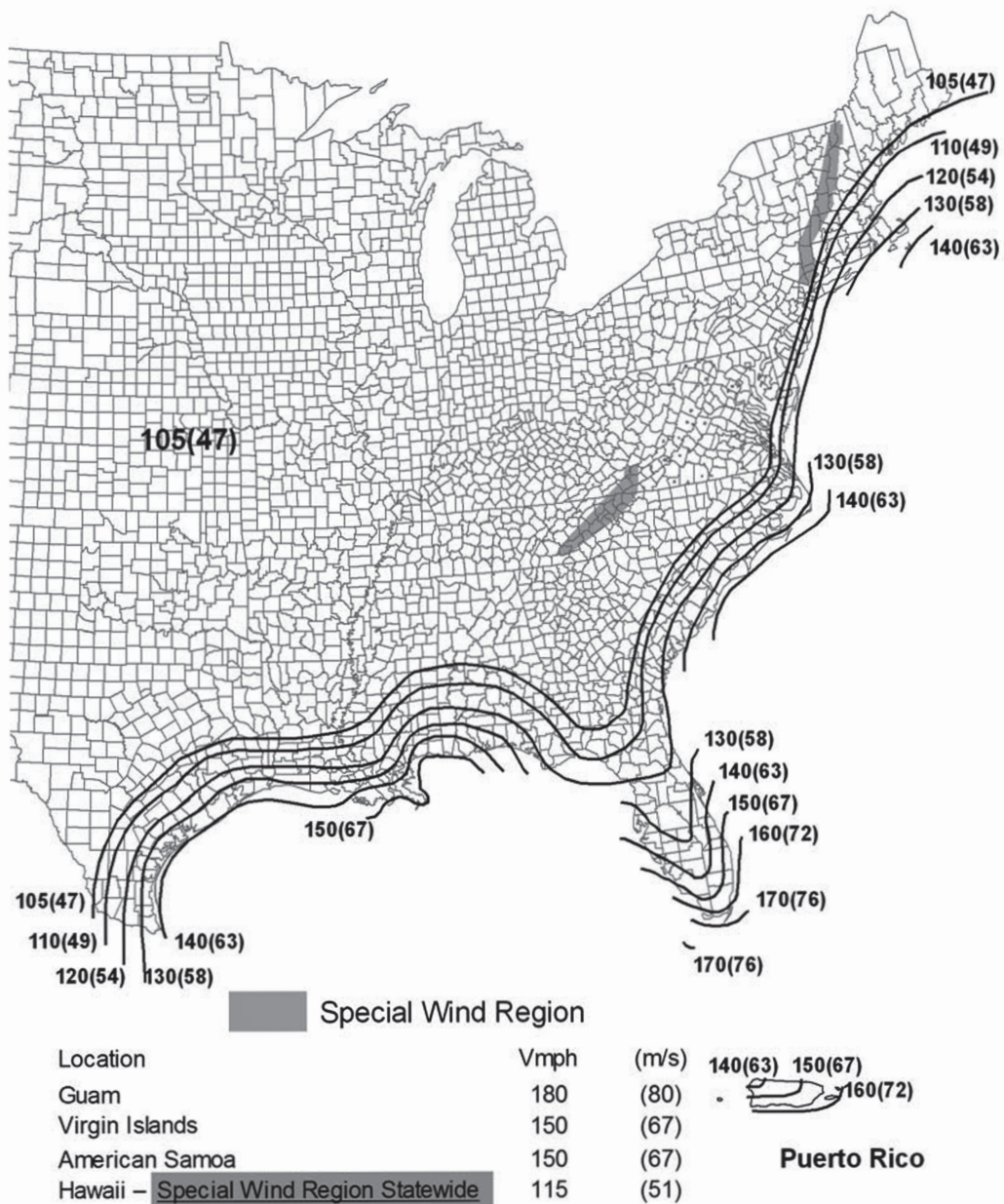


Figure 26.5-1c (Continued)

I did mention in my proposal that “conceptually, this work has many possible interpretations...”, but I never thought the ugliness of the piece in the proposed location would be a case for keeping the project in the air.

The proposed work’s approval
is still pending decision
by the UMass Public Art Committee.

MEETING EMILY DICKINSON

a site-specific interactive installation-performance that merges visual art and poetry

Instruction for the public:

Chose a piece of paper from within the house.

Write your poem.

You may leave your words behind to be read by others.

You may want to take it with you.

You may collaborate with some one else.

Meeting Emily Dickinson

Installation- participatory performance

Nima Nikakhlagh

August 2019 (proposed)

Locations involved: West Cemetery, Emily Dickinson Museum, and areas between the two.

Components/materials: string, irregular sheets/pieces of paper, pencils

Duration: open (could remain installed and interactive for the duration of the festival, or all day Saturday, or if necessary, could be limited to 90 minutes and scheduled by the committee)

Description: *Meeting Emily Dickinson* is an exercise in joining life to art and vice versa. The installation/ performance is specifically intended to invite people to observe life in a poetic way—during normal activities—and to use these observations as motivation to write or otherwise express themselves much the same way as Emily herself did while writing her poetry on whatever paper was available to her as she went about her daily life. Just as the work aims to join life to art, it also aims to connect life and death, the artist/poet with all people through time...even from the grave. In this piece, strings are used to literally show these connections. The connection between the grave and the house allows for numerous potential interpretations.

The installation creates a direct connection from Emily's grave to her house-museum – from her life to her death, from her time to the present, from her words to the world. Strings will be tied to the pencils that are left as tribute at Emily's gravesite. These strings will then lead to the museum and wind their way throughout the house ending with each individual string attached to some irregular piece of paper (different sizes, shapes, perhaps colors); some of the papers will be blank while others will have one line of the following poem hand-written upon them; pencils will be provided at the site of each piece of paper.

By following these strings, beginning at any point and ending at any point, the audience is invited to look at themselves, and the world around them, and encouraged to write their own words along the way. They can leave their words behind to be read by others, they can take their papers with them, they can take someone else's contribution, and in this way, there is the reminder of anonymity and chance that often accompanies artistic endeavors.

The present is present. We are here for some reason. We are here to see something. We are here to observe.

We are here, right now, to find out where we are going = where we have to be. There is nothing outside of us.

There is nothing stronger than us. There is no difference between us. There is a difference between our beliefs.

There is a difference between our desires. We are not apart from each other. We are a part of each other. Look.

[illegible]

This is us. Only us and no one else.

FREEING PAPER

Instruction for the public during the event:

Take one printed paper or two.
Write your thoughts, words, or poem on it.
Make a paper airplane from it.
Let it fly to others through the open windows.

Instruction for the public after the event:

Unfold the objects.
Read them, add to them with your own words
if you so choose.
Refrain from flying them within the library —
TAKE IT OUTSIDE.
Free them.

Freeing Paper

Participatory performance

Nima Nikakhlagh

September 2019 (proposed)

Locations involved: site-specific to the Forbes Library, Northampton, MA, and making use of both the library's indoor space as well as the Forbes Library lawn

Components/materials: during the performance itself—laptop, printer, paper, and pencils; after the performance, for the remainder of the event—artifacts consisting of the paper objects made by event attendees during the performance, and pencils

Duration: to be scheduled at the Council's discretion, but ideally the participatory performance would take place at the most likely time to attract the most community participants, for instance, the opening reception; it should be allotted not less than 3 hours

Description: *Freeing Paper* is a participatory event that merges visual art, poetry, and live action. It is an effort to create a space where a direct relationship between people can occur in the context of art rather than the more limited relationship between an artist and his/her audience in a traditional art space. During the performance, a three page poem (uploaded with this application) will be continuously printed from the artist's laptop to a printer. These pages can be read separately and are able to stand alone as single pages, or they can be read as a whole. People will be asked to write their own thoughts/words/poems on the printed papers, to make a paper airplane (object) from this paper, and then to share/send/fly their plane outside to others through the open windows of the library.

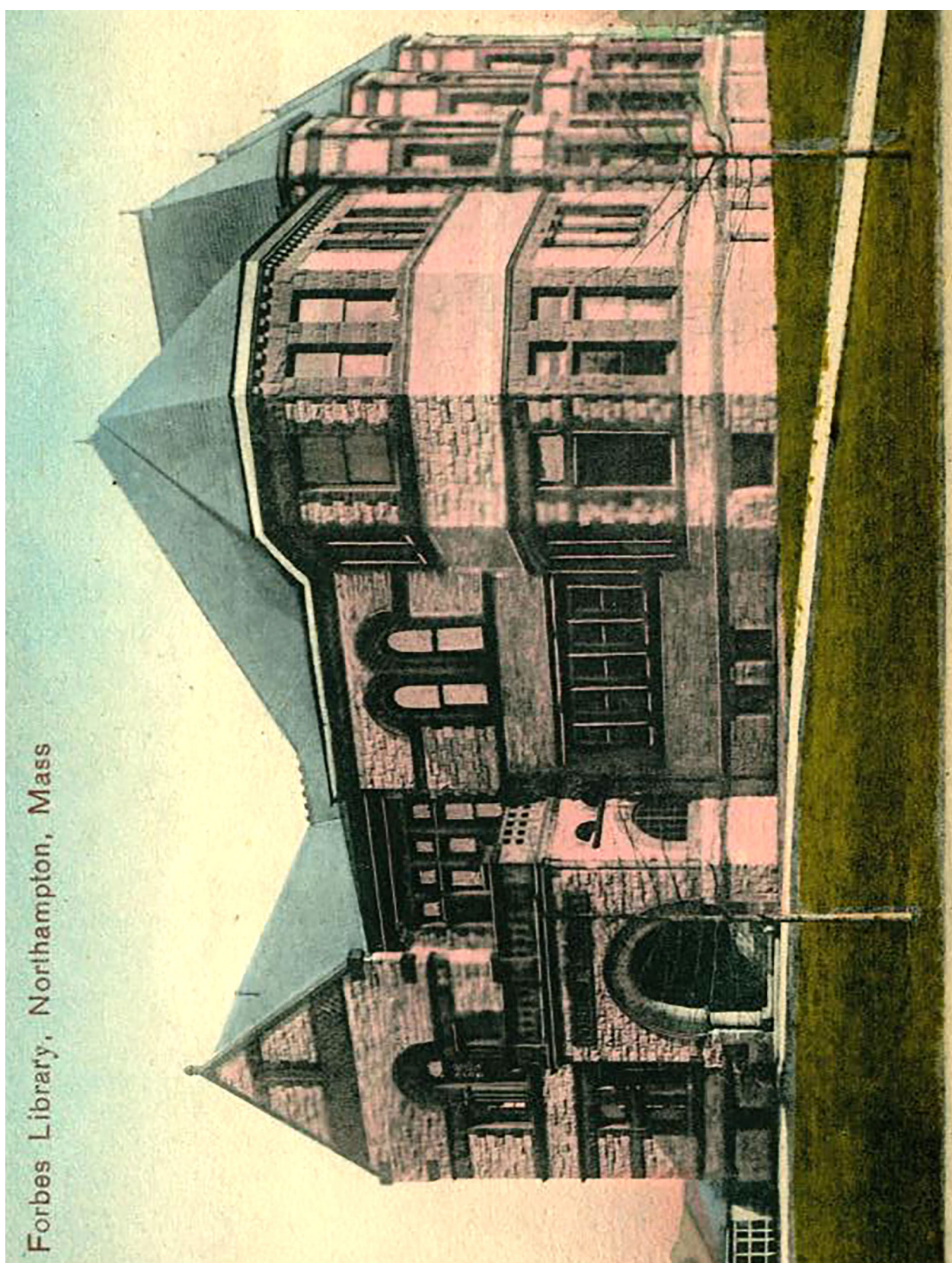
One side of each sheet of paper contains my words, and the other side is left blank for the attendees/participants/actors to contribute their own words or message. In this way, we will take the seed of thought, add to others' thoughts, and share our experience of life while exploring the power dynamic between people.

The performance will end with the action of the artist (me) collecting all the paper airplanes from the library's lawn in order to return the space to its original state. The participants' objects will be piled in a corner of the gallery (or any other location of the Council's choosing) as artifacts of the performance action. There will be a museum label near the pile that informs later attendees "You can unfold the objects, read them, add to them with your own words, and even take them when you leave if you so choose, but please refrain from flying them within the library—TAKE IT OUTSIDE." In this way the participatory nature of the piece continues after the performance for the duration of the Biennial.

The idea of beginning from inside, from one action, one place, with individuals extending the action through time, growing outward into the world, can be viewed symbolically as growth "from seed to fruition." Because this work invites active participation throughout the Biennial,

it continues to be live action far beyond the initial performance. The action of freeing paper—by flying paper airplanes—allows people to communicate in a poetic way through a playful activity. In this piece, just as in the process of fertility, the participation of people is required; this means that if no one acts and/or continues the path of execution, the piece will remain incomplete. If freedom is desired, the seed of freedom is in the action of people. And fruition, in any endeavor, is never achieved unless all elements come together and become intertwined. Some could see freeing (throwing) paper airplanes in a literal fashion as bombing or militaristic, when here it is about bringing an invitation to action, solidarity and freedom. There must be an art of action, taking steps—however small—to repair the social bond.

Note: I relinquish any ownership of the materials/artifacts after the initial action; if desired, I can collect them at the end of the event, but you are also free to do what you will with them including disposing of them or recycling them.



Forbes Library, Northampton, Mass

Forbes Library-Northampton-Mass, found image, print on paper, 6.5 x 8.5, 2020

THIS IS US

Instruction for the public:

Room A:

Enter.

Smell.

Eyes closed.

Motionless.

Depart.

Duration: limitless

Room B:

Enter.

Reach up as high as you can.

Write your name.

Feel free to use your native alphabet.

THIS IS US

Participatory performance-installation

Nima Nikakhlagh

September 2019 (proposed)

Location involved: Herter Art Gallery

Components/Materials: two white empty rooms, a contractor bag, pig blood, and markers

Description: it is a fact that people are being killed every day for political reasons. Even though wars, mass shootings, torture and all other forms of oppression have nothing to do with emotion, emotional and psychological consequences always result. *THIS IS US* is a participatory performance-installation to show the coexistence of violent action consequence and non-violent action. It aims to weigh the value, effect, and function of resistance in today's global political militaristic environment; as well as to further the cause of non-violent resistance by putting this emotional result on display.

Room A, has a contractor bag filled with blood hanging from the ceiling; the bag has a tiny hole in it. The room's entrance/doorway is covered with transparent plastic. There is a note near the entrance that informs audience "ENTRY PERMITTED."

Room B, is completely empty. There are some markers as well as a note near the empty room's entrance that informs participants "REACH UP AS HIGH AS YOU CAN TO WRITE YOUR NAME—FEEL FREE TO USE YOUR NATIVE ALPHABET."

Duration: the piece ideally requires a minimum of 15 to 20 days in order to collect a good number of signatures.

OVER MY DEAD BODY

Instruction for the public:

On one table is a radio with headphones.
On the other table is nothing.
Choose to sit at either table.
Duration: limitless

Over My Dead Body

Durational performance

Nima Nikakhlagh

November 2019 (proposed)

Location involved: Design Building Atrium, UMass Amherst

Components/Materials: two small tables with two chairs, a radio with headphones, a wooden box 72 inches long, 28 inches wide, and 23 inches tall, and onions.

Performance arrangement: a table and chair is placed directly across from another table and chair; between the two is placed the wooden box lengthwise. Inside the box is my living body atop chopped onions. On one table is a radio with headphones, on the other nothing.

Duration: the piece is expected not to exceed 3 hours. The duration could be shorter if there is an outside act of intervention.

Description: Over My Dead Body as an interactive performance, is an effort to create a space for immediate reaction of people in a public context. It aims to force a meditative moment of self-reflection within an environment symbolic of bustling frenetic everyday life. The action (through performance) is not meant to immortalize a work of art or an event, but it is meant to find this very moment of a person's immediate reaction. It is meant to access a small portion of their sensitivity and consciousness; this "very moment of immediate reaction" allows for the planting of a seed of the idea of action, of necessity.

During the performance, I will place myself in the open box. People/passers-by are free to sit at either table, to listen to the radio via headphones, or to simply watch.

[illegible]



 **URINALS**



P-e-a-c-e-P-e-a-c-e-P-e-a-c-e-P-e-a-c-e-P-e-a-c-e

Location-specific performance

Nima Nikakhlagh

April 2019 (proposed)

When I visited Mass MOCA for first time, I felt I am walking through a camp, an internment, concentration, even prison camp, which is now a museum of contemporary art. The place has a compound feeling to it. At some point during my visit, I needed to attend to nature; the restroom, I discovered, is the original factory bathroom, not modern and redesigned as is the museum space. Still my feeling was more about camps in which people were/are detained against their will.

This feeling lingered, lead me to research the location and history of Mass MOCA, and later developed into the idea of a performance in this bathroom. Particularly interesting to me is the effect this type of space has on a person's thoughts, behavior, emotional accessibility – people are in this space for a basic biological reason, one we all share, one none of us can escape; this is a common biological requirement of all people, an urgent, immediate, common purpose that is removed from whatever higher level thinking may have been taking place out and about looking at the museum's art works. This need removes barriers; it is a complete leveler where we become equal humans...free in a sense, even peaceful. The room itself, with this specific and solitary purpose, is function.

When in such a space, with such a base reason, a person becomes more present and available—their reaction can be nothing but completely genuine. My action (through performance) meant to access a small portion of spectators-participants sensitivity and consciousness; this “very moment of immediate reaction” allows for the planting of a seed of the idea of action, of necessity.

The performance will consist of a podium placed in the Mass MOCA men's room behind which I will stand for the duration of museum hours, each day for at least one month; during that time, I will repeat in a variety of ways the word “peace.” Because I am male, it will only be possible for me to perform within the men's room; for this reason, the performance will include a live feed with audio displayed on a screen within the women's bathroom; the live feed will only show me behind the podium and no other part of the men's room will be visible. On the wall in both the men's room and next to the live feed screen will be museum labels describing the piece.

While Mass MOCA inspired this piece, any similar location could work.

FREE OUR CAGED CHILDREN

"As the entire 165-year history of the border has shown, this particular antagonism cannot be "solved" by neoliberalism. Even more, the U.S.-Mexico border stands as a failure of this very line of thinking, a stark division within a pluralist society. What, then, is the job of the artist here?"³²

FREE OUR CAGED CHILDREN

Site-specific installation-participatory performance

Nima Nikakhlagh

November 2019 (proposed)

We all know that there is an on-going immigration issue at this country's southern border. It is sad, stressful and of course painful that children of asylum seekers have been kept in cages for more than two years at the U.S.-Mexico border. Just looking at some documentary pictures or reading only one or two paragraphs of the news about their situations and their mental health conditions would be enough to panic; to rise and to cry out for their immediate release.

FREE OUR CAGED CHILDREN is a political-humanitarian multi-disciplinary art project that aims to spread our collective voices throughout the country to free our caged children. The goal of this project is to unite as many universities/institutions as possible as quickly as possible. University of Massachusetts Amherst is intended to be the starting point for a much larger effort, and as such, the project will first strive to bring together both the undergraduate and graduate populations, along with the faculty, to work toward the children's release. The project has already garnered the full support of the Art Department Chair and faculty. Once UMass Amherst has united around this issue, the project will seek to unify universities country-wide.

In this project, the combination of the typographic texts, and political language-based visual art of the 1980s and '90s, High Line Art as an example of recent American contemporary art; the children in cages at the U.S.-Mexico border as an on-going immigration issue, and the use of the campus as a site-specific open-air platform, enable us to generate a space for conversation between art, people, and politics in both nonviolent and critical ways in order to push for the children's release. "It is a place where opinions must be exchanged, and distances reconciled. As a space where the act of seeing is very much at the center of every activity, the High Line stimulates a constant negotiation of points of views, which is precisely what High Line Art encourages."³³

To reach the goal for this collaborative art project, we are looking to find a suitable exhibition space that could be used for a large-scale print and its accompanying sound recording for public engagement. The installed print and its sound make up the visual component of the project; there are a number of performative components that will make use of other spaces on campus/town as well as involve the participation of students and faculty in a variety of ways.

This project's subject matter and purpose reach beyond aesthetics; activism (action) is necessary to achieve any socio-political change. The project will bring together other concerned and interested departments, such as Sociology (specifically Civil Resistance and Social Change), Political Science, Psychology, Communication and Journalism. Cross-departmental interaction and awareness, and its resulting larger team effort are required to make a true impact upon this situation. As opposed to the violent action, which is occurring to the children in cages, our humanitarian action is absolutely NOT violent. The children have nothing to do with politics and arms. They are NOT our enemies. We just want them freed. We want them to go to school. We want them to enjoy their lives with their families, just like our kids.

While this project is based on my concept, I need your collaboration to make it a reality; of course, it is already late, but surely there is still time to act. Their voices—our voices—must reach individual's ears. Undoubtedly, united people's voices can make the children's camps' doors open.

Description: the installation includes a large-scale print – 12 x 20 feet – on Banner Mesh on an open wall in a public place on campus (ideally on the Studio Arts Building) with its sound recording – the American national anthem – which plays once in the morning every business day. The project will organize a voluntary department-wide (including faculty) “open house” – a familiar term, especially in art schools, for the activity—live performances—of opening one's studio to share one's work with the public—to take place on a specific date for a specific time period. During these studio visits, each artist (student and faculty) will engage others and invite them to join this movement/campaign through their work/performance. Throughout the project, there will be other object-making and discussion opportunities for students in support of the project's goal.

Dear Arts Council,

11/12/19

I am writing in support of **Nima Nikakhlagh's** application for an Arts Council grant.

'FREE CAGED CHILDREN,' is a cry from the heart project proposal by Nima, a current second year graduate student in our MFA program. This project fulfills all the criteria to make a successful application to the Arts Council. It is also timely, urgent, and uniquely positioned to use art for social change.

The project clearly fulfills "artistic merit." Much thought has gone into crafting the image of the lettering to be posted on a gigantic scale on the wall of the Studio Arts Building. Using the bold, graphic frameworks established in the 1980's and 1990's by artists such as Jenny Holtzer and Barbara Kruger, Nima cleverly aligns himself with this genre of activist, political art. His aesthetic choice of the 'red, white, and blue' palette clearly exposes the underbelly of Nationalism as frighteningly jingoistic. Lastly, his non decorative, practical, font and utilitarian, straightforward design use symmetry and bold shape to emphasize his message.

Over the past two years, I have attended almost all of Nima's performances – except one he did in the stairwell of the Clark building which houses his studio. In all of his performances, the student body is engaged either through direct participation, implication, or as conscious, observing beings. Several undergraduate students have been inspired by his work to go on and do their own performances, evident in the work of BFA students Alice Erickson, and Jackie De La Rosa, for example. Further, the essence of this project rests in grassroots organising and word of mouth – Nima is expecting students to participate by sharing on social media, writing to their local representatives, forming discussion groups, and making their own artworks in response to this crisis. Nima is a unifying artist who galvanizes students. He excels at working in groups.

This project is ambitious and requires the Art Council as 'seed money' to make and install the large image in the Studio Arts Building. Nima has already met with me to discuss the project and ask for departmental support – which I gave. Despite the activism in the work, he is following protocol and is respectful of University guidelines and procedures. He has already been in touch with our building coordinator, Bob Woo regarding necessary steps to install in public buildings.

I strongly support this project and encourage the Arts Council to support Nima in his artistic endeavours.

Yours Sincerely,

Professor Shona Macdonald



Chair,
Department of Art



FREE
OUR CAGED
CHILDREN
TODAY

STUDIO ARTS BUILDING

11/3/2020

UMass Amherst Mail - Award: Arts Council Grant



Nima Nikakhlagh <nnikakhlagh@umass.edu>

Award: Arts Council Grant

The Arts Council <acouncil@acad.umass.edu>
To: nnikakhlagh@umass.edu

Fri, Nov 22, 2019 at 6:19 AM

Thank you for your recent application to the UMass Arts Council. Our volunteer Review Board met to consider grant applications and recommended that your proposal for FREE CAGED CHILDREN received a total amount of 1000 in this grant cycle. The comments of the Review Board are enclosed. The exact amount of your award will be transferred to your account immediately. The Final Project Report Form is due three weeks after the completion of your event. You may complete the Final Project Report form at www.umass.edu/facforms/finalreport. Your Grant ID for this report is: 44901. The Report Form helps us to assess the success of your program and helps us to improve the services we provide subsequent applicants. If we do not receive this form at the completion of your project, future funding for your organization will be in jeopardy. If you are unable to complete the report within three weeks of the end of your project, please notify the Council office by calling 545-0202. The Arts Council should be credited on all promotional materials as follows: "This program was made possible (in part) by a grant from the UMass Arts Council". If you have any questions, please call our office at 545-0202. The comments of the Review Board are: Panelists believed that this is a timely and important project and particularly liked the idea that it would hopefully resonate beyond the UMass campus. The narrative seemed ambiguous about where the project would take place: "we are looking to find a suitable exhibition space"; "The installation includes a large-scale print – 12 x 20 feet – on Banner Mesh on an open wall in a public place on campus" (ideally on the Studio Arts Building)". Other indicators suggested the Studio Arts Building was definite. Panelists were uncertain that the commitment of the Studio Arts Building was secure and were concerned about the timeline if it was not. The budget income section was not completed. Panelists very much liked the concept for this project but given the ambiguity of the location and the vague budget were unable to support this project at the fullest. Sincerely, Arts Council Staff acouncil@acad.umass.edu

<https://mail.google.com/mail/u/0?ik=e39c0a3323&view=pt&search=all&permmsgid=msg-f%3A1650900666756299471&simpl=msg-f%3A16509006667...> 1/1

11/3/2020

UMass Amherst Mail - Banner installation



Nima Nikakhlagh <nnikakhlagh@umass.edu>

Banner installation

Nima Nikakhlagh <nnikakhlagh@umass.edu>

Sun, Dec 1, 2019 at 5:16 PM

To: ltousignant@facil.umass.edu

Cc: Shona Macdonald <shona@art.umass.edu>, Bob Woo <rgfwoo@umass.edu>

Hello Liz

Hope all is well.

I am Nima Nikakhlagh an MFA student. I have a project that involves hanging a large banner on the outside of SAB. Its topic is the current situation of children at the U.S-Mexico border. This project has the full support of the department chair and has been awarded Art Council funding.

The opening event is scheduled for Dec. 17th. Attached is the mock up of the banner installed on SAB. Bob Woo told me that these things are coordinated through you. Please let me know how this works.

Thank you in advance for your assistance.

Best regards,

Nima



01A.jpg
1154K

<https://mail.google.com/mail/u/0?ik=e39c0a3323&view=pt&search=all&permmsgid=msg-a%3Ar2889190133214202102&simpl=msg-a%3Ar28891901...> 1/1

11/3/2020

UMass Amherst Mail - Banner installation



Nima Nikakhlagh <nnikakhlagh@umass.edu>

Banner installation

Liz Tousignant <ltousignant@facil.umass.edu>

Thu, Dec 5, 2019 at 7:55 AM

To: Nima Nikakhlagh <nnikakhlagh@umass.edu>

Cc: Shona Macdonald <shona@art.umass.edu>, Bob Woo <rgfwoo@art.umass.edu>, Pamela Monn <psmonn@facil.umass.edu>

Hi Nima,

Although I can help, your first step is to fill out a General Service request by visiting: <http://www.umass.edu/facilities/requests>.

You need to choose the green 'G', login with your NetID & password.

Once you submit that, shoot me an email with your notification and I will try to steer it in the right direction expeditiously.

Thanks,
Liz

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<https://mail.google.com/mail/u/0?ik=e39c0a3323&view=pt&search=all&permmsgid=msg-f%3A1652084461817496714&simpl=msg-f%3A16520844618...> 1/1

11/3/2020

UMass Amherst Mail - Banner installation



Nima Nikakhlagh <nnikakhlagh@umass.edu>

Banner installation

Liz Tousignant <ltousignant@facil.umass.edu>

Thu, Dec 5, 2019 at 8:38 AM

To: Nima Nikakhlagh <nnikakhlagh@umass.edu>

Cc: Shona Macdonald <shona@art.umass.edu>, Bob Woo <rgfwoo@art.umass.edu>, Pamela Monn <psmonn@facil.umass.edu>, Simon Raine <sraine@facil.umass.edu>

Good morning, again, Nima,

I have gotten more information about what is needed to have the banner hung.

You need to go through the University Public Arts Committee (UPAC). I have copied both Simon Raine and Pam Monn who sit on the committee. I don't know the process and will let them work with you.

~Liz

From: Nima Nikakhlagh <nnikakhlagh@umass.edu>

Sent: Sunday, December 1, 2019 5:16 PM

To: Liz Tousignant <ltousignant@facil.umass.edu>

Cc: Shona Macdonald <shona@art.umass.edu>; Bob Woo <rgfwoo@art.umass.edu>

Subject: Banner installation

Hello Liz

[Quoted text hidden]

<https://mail.google.com/mail/u/0?ik=e39c0a3323&view=pt&search=all&permmsgid=msg-f%3A1652087178636333271&simpl=msg-f%3A16520871786...> 1/1

11/3/2020

UMass Amherst Mail - Banner installation



Nima Nikakhlagh <nnikakhlagh@umass.edu>

Banner installation

Simon Raine <sraine@facil.umass.edu>

Thu, Dec 5, 2019 at 10:22 AM

To: Bob Woo <rgfwoo@art.umass.edu>, Liz Tousignant <ltousignant@facil.umass.edu>, Nima Nikakhlagh <nnikakhlagh@umass.edu>

Cc: Shona Macdonald <shona@art.umass.edu>, Pamela Monn <psmonn@facil.umass.edu>

Hi Nima et al.

I have attached the UPAC policy (and proposal guideline form). According to the policy, I'm afraid students are not permitted to hang work from buildings' facades (see Excluded public spaces on page 7).

Best,

Simon

Simon A. Raine, ASLA

Campus Designer/Planner

Campus Planning

A division of Facilities & Campus Services

University of Massachusetts

[360 Campus Center Way](#)

Amherst, MA 01003

Mobile: (413) 345-8217

www.umass.edu/facilities



We're here to help.

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2 attachments



2019-9-UPAC Policy.pdf
246K



2019-9-UPAC Proposal Guidelines Form.pdf

<https://mail.google.com/mail/u/0/?ik=e39c0a3323&view=pt&search=all&permmsgid=msg-f%3A1652093736885732387&simpl=msg-f%3A16520937368...> 1/2

Flexibility:

As with a Master Plan, the UPAC will regularly reassess its goals and strategies, allowing proper opportunities for student and community input. The UPAC will also work to identify sites on campus where art may be safely installed; encourage campus planners and architects to incorporate public art in their plans; inventory the University's works of public art and maintain copies of deeds of gifts or loan forms; and identify opportunities for donors to support public art on campus in coordination with the Development Office.

MAKEUP OF THE UNIVERSITY PUBLIC ART COMMITTEE (UPAC)**Membership:**

The membership of the UPAC will be:

- The Associate Vice Chancellor for Facilities and Campus Services or their representative (Chair)
- A representative from the University Museum of Contemporary Art
- A representative from the Office of Physical Plant
- A representative from the Campus Planning Department
- A representative from the Office of Design and Construction Management
- A representative from the Arts Extension Service
- An Associate or Deputy Provost
- A member of the Art Department faculty (appointed by Dean of HFA)
- A member of the Art History Department Faculty (appointed by Dean of HFA)
- A member of a non-Art Department faculty (appointed by Provost)
- A Representative from Student Affairs and Campus Life
- The Director of the Fine Art Center or their representative
- An undergraduate student
- A graduate student

Appointments:

Members of the UPAC are appointed due to the positions they hold within the University system. Their term does not expire. If professors go on sabbatical, they are responsible for suggesting suitable replacements to the Chair. The Chair is responsible for extending an invitation to the suggested replacement, or otherwise ensuring that each seat is filled. For permanent replacements of these positions, responsibility for finding a suitable candidate will return to the Dean of HFA.

DEFINITIONS**Campus public art:**

Art in all forms that is physically or visually accessible to the public through permanent or temporary installations that contributes to the experience of the natural or built public spaces, both indoors and outdoors. It can include memorials, historical works, class gifts in public

places, and in some cases landscaping and gardening. At its best, public art is more than just art installed in public places. Public art is a mirror that reflects the local environment, cultural values, and artistic vibrancy of the community in which it exists. It is a participatory, dialogical, community-based process that enhances the quality of life of community-members by encouraging a heightened sense of place, raising the community's prestige, and enlivening the visual quality of the built environment.

Time frames:

- Permanent installations (accession):
 - Public art that is the permanent property of UMA and/or is installed for more than three years (e.g. a stone sculpture installed on a quad). Works of art that are installed for a "considerable duration" are subject to the Deaccession Procedures (see: DEACCESSIONING)
- Semi-permanent exhibitions (non-accession):
 - Public art that is not the property of UMA but is installed over a long period of time (1 to 3 years) (e.g. an ephemeral work of environmental art made from local materials that will decompose over 2 years); or public art that is or is not the property of UMA and is installed for 1 to 3 years (e.g. a painting that may be displayed in the Library for one year)
- Temporary exhibitions (non-accession):
 - Public art that is or is not the property of UMA and is installed for a short period of time, approximately 1 day to 1 year (e.g. a performance in an unconventional space that takes place on a single night)

Appropriate sites:

- Major public spaces:
 - These spaces qualify for the placement of works of public art of all time frames. Exterior major public spaces are defined by groupings of campus buildings, major vehicular or pedestrian pathways through the campus, or by open spaces created through the master planning process. Interior major public spaces are defined by buildings of significant size and import to the campus that provide a substantial lobby, atrium or place of congregation in which a work could relate to the context and intent of the space. Both exterior and interior locations will inherently allow the work of art to be viewed by a large number of students, faculty, employees and visitors on a daily basis.
- Ancillary public spaces:
 - These spaces are within buildings and consist of public hallways, bathrooms, and small-scale alcoves, as well as other miscellaneous spaces that provide support to the buildings occupancy and are open to the public but are not of a grand scale.
As the scope of public access to these spaces is inherently more limited than access to major public spaces, ancillary public spaces are only qualified for the placement of temporary installations or student work.
- Excluded public spaces:
 - Students are not permitted to hang work from buildings' facades; Artists who wish to do so will be directed to the appropriate person in Facilities for

consultation and approval. The artist may be required to include a structural engineer in their team if the installation requires a permit. (see: PROPOSAL GUIDELINES and APPENDIX 2: PROPOSAL GUIDELINES FORM). Brick and curtain-walled facades will not be permitted.

- Because it falls under the authority of the University Museum of Contemporary Art (UMCA), the lobby of the Fine Arts Center will not be an appropriate site for consideration by the UPAC.

ACQUISITIONS AND EXHIBITIONS

Key principles of acceptable works:

While the selection of specific works might at times be controversial or challenging, the process of selection will always consider the issues of artistic quality, site context, public sensibilities, durability, maintenance, safety, and cost. Proposals for new acquisitions should follow the PROPOSAL GUIDELINES.

- Proposed art should display a high level of artistic quality that supports and enhances the academic and creative missions of the campus. It should be a useful teaching tool in support of the educational objectives of the University.
- An appropriate site in campus public space must be available so that the work may be presented to its best possible advantage (as determined by the UPAC in conjunction with appropriate stakeholders).
- In conjunction with the University's sustainability goals, when possible, new works should promote or demonstrate environmental consciousness by:
 - promoting biodiversity of plants and habitat types;
 - making use of local materials and resources;
 - minimizing the amount of energy used in fabrication;
 - planning for low maintenance techniques;
 - making efficient design choices (e.g. design for reuse or with reclaimable or recyclable materials, avoid ozone depleting materials);
 - using ethically sourced labor and materials.
- Proposed art must be structurally sound and present no environmental or safety hazard. It should be durable enough for on-campus exhibition (unless conceptually otherwise).
- The work must come to the University with clear documentation of current ownership and provenance.
- To accept any new works into the collection, the UPAC must have access to funds to cover all costs of acquisition, purchase, shipping, installation, appraisal, insurance if applicable, storage if applicable, and, perhaps most vitally, maintenance.

Types of Acquisition:

- Purchase (accession)
 - The UPAC either uses its own funds or channels the funds of an on-campus group to purchase an already extent artwork from an individual artist or artist collective.
- Commission (accession)

11/3/2020

UMass Amherst Mail - Banner installation



Nima Nikakhlagh <nnikakhlagh@umass.edu>

Banner installation

Nima Nikakhlagh <nnikakhlagh@umass.edu>

Thu, Dec 5, 2019 at 2:27 PM

To: Simon Raine <sraine@facil.umass.edu>

Cc: Bob Woo <rgfwoo@art.umass.edu>, Liz Tousignant <ltousignant@facil.umass.edu>, Shona Macdonald <shona@art.umass.edu>, Pamela Monn <psmonn@facil.umass.edu>

Hi Simon,

So glad to hear from you. I actually feel like you are a part of us in art department as we meet constantly based my works of art.

As I've learned through my practice with UPAC, I'm guessing the committee will meet next friday Dec.13th. Since the opening event is scheduled Dec. 17 in our department, could you please add me to the committee meeting next week? I highly appreciate that! I've also attached the project proposal that will give you an idea of the project and what it is all about.

I just talked to Shona Macdonald who is our department chair, and she said she will come with me to the committee. I've also talked with Robin Mandel and sent him the project proposal in advance that he would be aware of what is going on as a committee member.

Since we've had a successful experience recently with "Soundbox", I hope this project will happen with your help again. Looking forward to meeting you soon.

I appreciate your time and your help.

Best,
Nima

[Quoted text hidden]



FREE CAGED CHILDREN-Proposal.pdf
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11/3/2020

UMass Amherst Mail - Banner installation



Nima Nikakhlagh <nnikakhlagh@umass.edu>

Banner installation

Simon Raine <sraine@facil.umass.edu>

Thu, Dec 12, 2019 at 3:16 PM

To: Nima Nikakhlagh <nnikakhlagh@umass.edu>

Cc: Bob Woo <rgfwoo@art.umass.edu>, Liz Tousignant <ltousignant@facil.umass.edu>, Shona Macdonald <shona@art.umass.edu>, Pamela Monn <psmonn@facil.umass.edu>

Hi Nima,

My apologies for not getting back to you sooner.

UPAC is not meeting this month, our next meeting is scheduled for Jan 10.

Since your proposal is to hang a banner from a building, which is prohibited, I have passed your request on to some folks in senior campus administration. I think you should be contacted shortly.

Sorry I can't be more help,

Simon

Simon A. Raine, ASLA

Campus Designer/Planner

Campus Planning

A division of Facilities & Campus Services

University of Massachusetts

360 Campus Center Way

Amherst, MA 01003

Mobile: (413) 345-8217

www.umass.edu/facilities



We're here to help.

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11/3/2020

UMass Amherst Mail - Banner installation



Nima Nikakhlagh <nnikakhlagh@umass.edu>

Banner installation

Nima Nikakhlagh <nnikakhlagh@umass.edu>

Thu, Dec 12, 2019 at 7:15 PM

To: Simon Raine <sraine@facil.umass.edu>

Cc: Bob Woo <rgfwoo@art.umass.edu>, Liz Tousignant <ltousignant@facil.umass.edu>, Shona Macdonald <shona@art.umass.edu>, Pamela Monn <psmonn@facil.umass.edu>

Hi Simon,

No problem at all. Thank you so much for letting me know. I understand everything these days is under policies even our being. I know you, and I'm sure you are always trying to help.

I hope someone can make the caged children free!

Thanks again for your consideration.
Nima

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11/4/2020

UMass Amherst Mail - Fwd: FREE CAGED CHILDREN-Proposal.pdf



Nima Nikakhlagh <nnikakhlagh@umass.edu>

Fwd: FREE CAGED CHILDREN-Proposal.pdf

Shona Macdonald <shona@art.umass.edu>

Fri, Dec 13, 2019 at 11:00 AM

To: Nima Nikakhlagh <nnikakhlagh@umass.edu>, Robin Mandel <rmandel@art.umass.edu>

Hi Nima and Robin

Did you read this decision? Is this something the public art committee can contest?

Shona

Begin forwarded message:

From: Joseph Bartolomeo <bartolomeo@hfa.umass.edu>

Date: December 13, 2019 at 10:06:47 AM EST

To: Shona Macdonald <shona@art.umass.edu>

Cc: Julie Hayes <jhayes@hfa.umass.edu>

Subject: FREE CAGED CHILDREN-Proposal.pdf

Dear Shona,

Since Julie is out of town, the Vice Chancellor for Administration and Finance brought this to me. Campus policy does not allow for the hanging of banners from buildings such as what is proposed here. I believe that Simon Raine from Campus Planning has already communicated this to Nima Nikakhlagh, but I just wanted to make sure that Nima and the department are aware that this is not possible. Could you please share this with Nima?

Thanks,

Joe

Joseph Bartolomeo
Professor of English

Associate Dean

College of Humanities and Fine Arts
University of Massachusetts Amherst
bartolomeo@hfa.umass.edu

413-545-3407

2 attachments



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11/4/2020

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Nima Nikakhlagh <nnikakhlagh@umass.edu>

Fwd: FREE CAGED CHILDREN-Proposal.pdf

Robin Mandel <rmandel@art.umass.edu>
To: Shona Macdonald <shona@art.umass.edu>
Cc: Nima Nikakhlagh <nnikakhlagh@umass.edu>

Fri, Dec 13, 2019 at 12:29 PM

Hi Shona

I wasn't aware of this decision officially, but I was aware from Nima and Simon Raine that this might end up being the issue. I don't know that the UPAC can exercise much influence at this point - Simon Raine is the Chair of that committee, and it sounds like decisions have already been rendered at the Dean and Vice Chancellor level. Where do you go from there?

Robin Mandel
Assistant Professor and Undergraduate Program Director
Department of Art
University of Massachusetts Amherst
rmandel@art.umass.edu
www.robinmandel.net

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11/4/2020

UMass Amherst Mail - Fwd: FREE CAGED CHILDREN-Proposal.pdf



Nima Nikakhlagh <nnikakhlagh@umass.edu>

Fwd: FREE CAGED CHILDREN-Proposal.pdf

Nima Nikakhlagh <nnikakhlagh@umass.edu>
To: Robin Mandel <rmandel@art.umass.edu>
Cc: Shona Macdonald <shona@art.umass.edu>

Fri, Dec 13, 2019 at 7:47 PM

Dear Shona and Robin,

Hope you both are well.

I received this message via email from Simon yesterday... "Since your proposal is to hang a banner from a building, which is prohibited, I have passed your request on to some folks in senior campus administration. I think you should be contacted shortly." I had no doubt that they will veto and stop the project. And here is my response to Simon just for your information.

Hi Simon,

No problem at all. Thank you so much for letting me know. I understand everything these days is under policies even our being. I know you, and I'm sure you are always trying to help.

I hope someone can make the caged children free!

Thanks again for your consideration.

Based on the UPAC policy on page 7, "students are not permitted to hang work from buildings' facades;" but "Artists" are... I wish I could become an artist one day...

Btw, I am thankful for your support. It means a lot to me! See you both soon.

Best regards,
Nima

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 **2019-9-UPAC Policy.pdf**
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As a socially-engaged and activism-driven artist, I too see that the United States government's immigration policy's structural violence, stemming from neoliberalist ideology and nationalism, has crossed the line into direct personal/physical violence with its caging of children at the U.S.-Mexico border. This latest development is an urgent call to action. This specific state-ordered violence that has led to the annihilation of thousands of children's lives will permanently mark this disgraceful period of American political behavior through history, just as it will forever

alter the cultural and physical landscape of those affected. In order to address social issues, and of course to act upon this particular anti-humanitarian atrocity, “artivism” must challenge the new and unfortunate culture of complacency and powerlessness that seems to have taken hold of the U.S. citizenry by returning power to the people through collective action and voice. If traditional activism has not played/doesn’t play a role in the population’s everyday lives, art always has and does in some form. So again, ‘what, then, is the job of the artist here?’



WARS ARE NEVER FAIR, performance still, 2019, photo by Lucia Bekes



IS AMERICA AMERICA IS

an attempt to exercise participatory democracy in a way that the created situation seeks more contact with people, and at the same time, asks for public entry to the decision-making process that is to affect their political lives. It is meant to access a small portion of their sensitivity and consciousness; critically, this invitation to “freedom of speech” allows for the planting of a seed of the idea of action, of necessity.

IS AMERICA AMERICA IS

Performance-sculpture

Nima Nikakhlagh

May 2020 (proposed)

Locations involved: location-specific to the Sculpture Center - In Practice, ground floor, center of "E" (entrance) area; floor space required: 19" x 13"

Components/materials: during the performance: printed letter size paper, my body, and small United States of America flag; after the performance, and for the duration of the exhibition: printed letter size paper, two pencils, and museum label.

Performance duration: as long as I can hold the flag aloft.

Description: *IS AMERICA AMERICA IS* begins as a "still-life" performance that transitions to a performative sculpture; the sculpture is outlined on the floor with white tape. During the opening, my body, standing upon two equal height stacks of pre-printed letter size paper (approximately 8" high), and holding the United States flag aloft, will greet Sculpture Center visitors in much the same way as an historic monument. When I am no longer physically able to hold the flag up, the flag and I will leave the space. This marks the end of the performance and the beginning of the performative sculpture. At this time, one black pencil is placed on each stack of paper and the museum label is placed on the floor just to the right of the two paper stacks. On the museum label, after the formal piece information, is printed "I stood, one foot upon each stack, and held the United States flag aloft with my right hand until I was no longer physically able. Please take pages, write your thoughts, and do with them as you will." The pages are printed with "IS AMERICA..." (left stack) and "AMERICA IS..." (right stack) with the rest of each lined sheet left blank. During the exhibition, Sculpture Center staff should be instructed to allow visitors to touch and remove sheets of paper (and even pencils), and to replenish the papers and pencils (provided by artist) as needed to maintain the original sculpture (paper stacks) at approximately their starting height, one pencil upon each.

THE EMBODIED PUBLIC BODY ON CAMPUS:

a piece to perform

It is a pandemic. Let's assume it is not.

We all are staying inside. Let's imagine we are not.

We are not doing public events. Let's say we are.

We are not allowed to make public art performances on campus. Let's pretend we are.

The campus is politically a giant private space. Let's call it "public" for now.

We cannot prove it. Let's observe it.

I am standing outside on campus in front of the bus station facing the Studio Arts Building.

You embody my action there while I am not there.

Another me is standing across the street in front of another bus station facing the Fine Arts Center. You, my dear, embody another me there across the street while the other me is also not there.

Let's hear all the sounds outside as 'normal' streetlife.

Let's imagine people are moving around like real public space and time.

I am wrapping my body with plaster bandages while I am inhaling the SAB.

Another me is blowing up countless white balloons nonstop while he is exhaling the FAC.

Let's feel all the interactions and interruptions caused by this embodied performance.

Let's ignore the buses that pass frequently through our bodies and cut off our voices.

We are trying to get louder and louder.

Let's believe that someone will hear us.

Let's believe that someone will see us.

At least another someone across the street.

THE EMBODIED PUBLIC BODY ON CAMPUS:

a piece to read

I-T-I-S-A-P-A-N-D-E-M-I-C-L-E-T'S-A-S-S-U-M-E-I-T-I-S-N-O-T
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THE MAN WITHOUT CONTENT
NONVIOLENT STRUGGLE
WHAT WE MADE

WHAT IS ART?
WHAT IS ART?
WHAT DO YOU DO WITH AN IDEA?
PERFORMANCE NOW
THE ARTIST'S BODY
AKADEMIE X
ART THROUGH THE AGES
REMBRANDT PAINTINGS

MAN, UNTITLED, NIMA NIKAKHLAGH, APRIL 2020. PHOTO BY NIKI NIKAKHLAGH



THEORETICAL—PRACTICAL CONCLUSION

Since our biological life and political life have become indistinguishable from each other, and everything has become strategic, and if the aim of contemporary art today is still to be influential, then, contemporary art must also be strategic.

SUB-SECTION ON “THE CONTEMPORARY” — IN ART / EDUCATION / SOCIETY

For me, the term ‘contemporariness’ has always been challenging and raises many fundamental questions. Of course, Agamben’s profound interpretation of contemporaneity, and his decisive answer to the question “What Is the Contemporary?”³⁴, can totally convince us and lead us from a theoretical dialogue to the world of action. “Contemporariness is, then, a singular relationship with one’s own time, which adheres to it and, at the same time, keeps a distance from it. More precisely, it is *that relationship with time that adheres to it through a disjunction and an anachronism*.”³⁵ Nonetheless, my question as a practitioner, a seeker who always looks at the world, and basically life, through the lens of art, is that how do I define being contemporary, or more precisely, how do I practice *contemporariness*? Or how do I make my art contemporary? Or the same as the original question: ‘*What Is the Contemporary?*’

It is clear that contemporary art cannot be separated from contemporary life. It cannot be anything else. We contemporaries have created and defined time, extracted the word contemporary through language from the heart of time, mastered it, developed it, and presented it. We as contemporary bodies have conceptualized *the contemporary* and understood it. Therefore, we are constantly at the heart of contemporary time, but not necessarily representing it in its constructed situation. This is just like when we are in our body but not certainly ‘present’ in it. We are contemporaries in that our private biological body—our very life—is never separate from our political body even for a moment. If a philosopher is the one who realizes the potentiality of thought, who brings philosophical concepts into existence? If the object of philosophy is always to create new concepts, what is the object of contemporariness for an artist? If a person—a philosopher—is committed to the origins of philosophy, how can this principle be different in the category of art, or even in the category of education? How can the approach of an educator be something other than the approach of a philosopher or an artist while all three intellectual contemporary gestures are living in the same contemporary situation?

“The contemporary is he who firmly holds his gaze on his own time so as to perceive not

its light, but rather its darkness. [...] The contemporary is precisely the person who knows how to see this obscurity, who is able to write by dipping his pen in the obscurity of the present."³⁶ If we know and agree with this statement, what really is our approach and responsibility for this awareness? How can we realize in act the potentiality of contemporariness? Shouldn't we educators—especially art educators—be contemporary? Is it not our task to persuade those who legislate for us, and beyond that, compel us to abide by those legislated rules—which are in complete contradiction with the nature of art and education—that the educational apparatus must also think and be contemporary? For we teach contemporary art in our classrooms, we build Museums of Contemporary Art on our campuses, we expect our students to learn from us, but the fact is that we do not allow them to practice and experiment with their own thoughts. If not here, then where? It is exactly as if we teach all the musical instruments to the students but deprive them of the freedom to compose. Or we give our students a degree in literature and officially introduce them as poets, but do not allow them to write poetry as a poet writes. In which library and for what purpose are such theses kept that all are condemned to wear uniforms like military soldiers? This is an important question to consider. Another serious and fundamental question for legislators is: why should an educational institution not give the authority and freedom to its art department to create the capacity and opportunities—beyond the classroom—for their students to act, and for their students to have real and greater experiences during their academic career which travel with them into the real world? What will be the restricted students' role in tomorrow's society?

Do we feel that we should be extremely sensitive to our lives, and consequently, make life, and movement itself, the most essential condition for producing any question? To what degree do we feel that life is not a joke? Each of us as a conscious persona in our life, whether as an artist, intellectual, or scholar, has, of course, asked ourselves (at least once) the root meaning and application of art and education. We have also, and certainly, noticed the *invisible* violent policies and systematic limitations that have been imposed by the politics-education apparatus. Such an existing but invisible structural power of control and censorship in the state of education is like the operation of temples; "temples have always been emblems of power, but in a way disguised by the spirituality of their practices and their claims."³⁷ Since the state of education expresses—in the same way as temples—the spirit of service to life by connecting knowledge to action, the realities of power, policies, and censorship necessarily remain invisible. As Herbert Read states in his book *Education Through Art*, "freedom is a condition of education, [...] and one must naturally be first free and independent, but independence is a path and not a dwelling place. [...] Freedom in education is nothing else but possessing the ability to become united. It is the run before the leap, the tuning of the violin before it plays. The struggle for freedom, to which men rightly dedicate their lives, should be regarded as a struggle for the right to experiment: liberty is not an end in itself, not a policy or a programme. To be free of all ties is a misfortune – to be borne as a cross, not as a crown of glory. It means that responsibility, instead of being shared by many generations, must be personal. To live in freedom is a personal responsibility, or it is a mere farce."³⁸

Now that we know what the contemporary is, whether in terms of chronological meaning, or as a philosophical concept, or its literal life function, we must consider the characteristics

of our time and, in fact, we must act upon the reality of the politically constructed situation in which we live. According to this imperative, being 'the contemporary' no longer belongs only to the philosophical context. It is a social task and a daily practice for us contemporary bodies. It is our choice to acknowledge its vital importance to undertake it and exercise it or do nothing.

Undoubtedly, the artist, like any other human being, is the child of his or her time, but he or she is not and should not be obedient to it or subject to favoritism. It is the artist who has always been able to free him/herself from the rules and be a manifestation of dynamism, flourishing, and creation. Hence, artistry is more of a gesture than a skill. "*Gesture* is the name of [the] intersection between life and art, act and power, general and particular, text and execution. It is a moment of life subtracted from the context of individual biography as well as a moment of art subtracted from the neutrality of aesthetics: it is pure praxis."³⁹

Returning to the prevailing theory that the artist is, or should be, aware of the condition of his or her time, the question that arises, at least for me, is, what is the purpose of art? Answering this question requires personal clarification. Why art? What do I want out of art? Perhaps we should first determine which of the two following basic questions takes precedence over the other: "What is art?" and/or "Why do we make art?" If we had the right to choose only one question to answer, which one would we choose? Is our priority to know why we make art, or is it to define what art is? In fact, how crucial is it for an artist—the contemporary—to answer these clichéd (but not meaningless) questions?

This argumentation is not only taking place while the issues of the age of the spectacle are still unresolved, but while widespread destructive numbness empties and nullifies every real identity. It is precisely the politics in which we live. Guy Debord's *The Society of the Spectacle* is the clearest, most profound, contemporary analysis of the miseries and suppression of a society that now has extended over the globe. "It is clear that the society of the spectacle is also one in which all social identities have dissolved and in which everything that for centuries represented the splendor and misery of the generations succeeding themselves on Earth has by now lost all its significance."⁴⁰ From this perspective, the vital importance of radical action toward humanity and freedom must be understood and supported. "Like modern society itself, the spectacle is at once united and divided. In both, unity is grounded in a split. As it emerges in the spectacle, however, this contradiction is itself contradicted by virtue of a reversal of its meaning: division is presented as unity, and unity as division."⁴¹ There is no doubt that when we take a closer and critical look at art-making today, we find that contemporary art based on Agamben's definition of contemporariness is extremely minimal in the face of the intensity and multiplicity of the destructiveness of contemporary politics. With that said, being compromised by the standards of the society of the spectacle has captured the public and public opinion. "The revolution used to have to compromise with capital and with power, just as the church had to come to terms with the modern world. Thus, the motto that has guided the strategy of progressivism during the march toward its coming to power slowly took shape: one has to yield on everything, one has to reconcile everything with its opposite, intelligence with television and advertisement, the working class with capital, freedom of speech with the state of the spectacle, the environment with industrial development, science with opinion, democracy with the electoral machine, bad conscience and abjuration with memory and loyalty."⁴²

Living in the state of contemporary politics, in Agamben's words "the state of exception that has now become the rule" brings up the repetitive and historical question of 'what is life?'. Isn't it worth asking this fundamental question again and again? The sad and miserable division and dissociation that rules our existence stemmed from 'progressivism' which is the principle of compromise. Whenever we say the word 'life', we must accept that it does not mean its external form, but instead means the sensitive and existential core that its external form cannot touch, and does not have access to, unless we go beyond that. What gives our time a demonic face is that we seek art, and thus life, only in external forms. We forget that mysterious realities can be revealed even in the most difficult and complex situations. Even those under the pressure of torture, convey the secrets they want through the gestures and signs they leave behind. If contemporary art is not about contemporary life, then what is it about, and what does it serve? If we accept the new fashionable yet erroneous way of thinking that, because countless thinkers, philosophers, and artists have done a great job in the past, and have already answered these questions, it is no longer something new and valuable for art and its market, then we are truly looking at life as an object and not as an essence of being, an existence. The existence of art is inseparable from the existence of life. To me this inseparability represents a total commitment to knowing art not as something I do, but something I live—I call this *truth-life*. We need life, first and foremost, and we need to believe in what gives us life and existence. It seems that this is where the democratic materialistic society of the spectacle strikes its fatal blow and does not allow the principle of life, which is also to be free, to exist. Each time we look at the three phenomena of Humanity, Art, and Education, at any time, and from any angle, the element of life is inseparably immersed in it.

SUB-SECTION ON "DIGITAL LIFE" — TECHNOLOGY IN ART / EDUCATION / SOCIETY

As we must consider the characteristics of our time, and one enormous life-altering characteristic of our time now is the ever-present, overwhelming reliance upon technology, let us agree that life today is more a digital life than just the modern machinery of life. By digital, I mean the rule of 'speed' and 'ease' which dominates human life and relationships. This digitalization of Western civilization has extended well beyond the West, and its impact can be clearly seen even on the rich Eastern cultures and traditions that date back thousands of years. The two features of speed and ease in operation of a digital device go hand in hand and avert any idea of pause. As a result, the term 'digital life' can be a more acquired phrase for the present discussion and gives us a more precise meaning. This rapid and superficial form of life that is nothing but the developed plan of democratic materialism, is the reality of our daily lives and one of the destructive rules of our time that is obliterating human nature and values. This is the annihilation of the human being through time that must be seen, understood, and severely criticized, but beyond that, it must be fought to prevent the death of human emotions, peace, and freedom, even if it seems naïve. In order to defend life itself, as a naked form, an absolute

human right, and its undeniable connection with art and contemporaneity, we must do further exhumation and reconsider another historical question: do I make art for art's sake and its market, or do I make art with the intention of emancipation? Should art be only in the service of art, or life? This is like asking what is the purpose of education. Is education to produce as many degrees as possible like a business, or is it to stay faithful to the aim of education through art which is "the creation of artists or of people efficient in the various modes of expression"⁴³ ? If the latter, my performance as a student-artist cannot and should not be different from each other. If my own decision has been to know and make art in the service of *truth-life*, which it still is, hereafter, I do not have to compromise to censorship and the suppressive political rules of the educational community and institutions just to receive a degree or simply to survive. On the contrary, I have to commit to the spirit of education, and consider the truth of the act of creation and pursue it. I think and believe that I also have to stand for the integrity of the artist and educator, both in my personal and social life, which are ultimately one. Of course, when we talk about art and education, we are no longer just considered as individuals. We are all people. Our lives are deeply entwined with others in society, whether politically, economically, culturally, or simply as fellow human beings. This is an undeniable fact. Therefore, we may need, additionally, to consider the necessity of experimentation and the significance of innovation in education—in other words, the importance of the avant-garde. It is still conceivable to defend the notion of the avant-garde not only in terms of form, but rather as gesture—radical action, to reconsider human life and its values. Is this something defensible? It is a question whether it is wrong to defend a legacy and primitive historical character. I wonder whether it is naïve to resist injustice in order to defend the truth. This begs the question of what to make of our human legacy. Where does the legacy of art as truth and experience lie? I contend that the Fine Arts as well as our human legacy lie within the matter of creation. Then I must ask is artistic creativity something detached from the structure of art education, or education in general? These initial questions are not easily answered; in fact, they lead to many more *truth-life* questions that inform my daily practice.

Consider the following fundamental, existential questions: if the essence of art and artists' commitment to themselves and their community and society is to draw close people's attention to life, what should be his or her art form? If the form of a work of art is the indivisible receptacle from the content of the work, how can this form itself become life? In what way can my body (our body), my life (our life) reflect the contemporary situation? What is the difference between my body and others? What is the difference between my life and others' life? We all get one birth, one life, and one death. Let's explore this discussion in more detail. For instance, if the content of a work of art that is intertwined with its human nature disagrees with the content of contemporary digitalization, then, should the form of the work be as fast, easy, and superficial as the essence of the digital world is? How can such a work of art pause the fast-moving audience today and pull them into the work? In what manner can a purely digital work shock the contemporary human and literally emancipate them as much as possible from the world that they are immersed within, and furthermore, provide conditions for the audience to be able to perceive themselves, their lives, and even the world around them from a distance?

The need to interrupt, to shock, to create distance, as the imperative strategy, has become a

central focus of my thoughts and practice as a performance-driven artist. That is, precisely, the place where the moment finds its meaning and plays its vital role. For example, the possibility of pausing a frame of a film while we are watching it, allows us to separate ourselves from the time, mood, and atmosphere of the story, and at the same time, from such detachment, we are able to consciously focus on the specific point that we want and analyze it from a distance. Therefore, relatively, another practical question arises: how can an analog life be paused for a moment, like a digital device or the computer, and allowed to be reviewed and analyzed from the outside? Only art can answer this need. As American Physicist Freeman Dyson tells us, software and technology facilities are useful means but they're not all that philosophically important. We all agree that technology is a great thing and has done a great deal for us, but the essence of human nature is not changed by it, nor are the most important questions of humanity.

Some excellent examples of digital technology serving as tools in the furtherance of art's truthful representation of human life can be found in the medium of cinema in which the best filmmakers create the time, mood, and atmosphere of the story and do so without having those tools take center stage. In terms of technique and form, what is the characteristic difference between filmmakers who look at life itself through the lens of a camera, such as Ingmar Bergman, Yasujiro Ozu, Abbas Kiarostami, and the like, and other filmmakers who use the movie industry and special effects as the main focus of their work? Although all films in the world are a cinematic lie, or in the sense of philosophy "the element of cinema is gesture and not image,"⁴⁴ it can be said with certainty, and it is a fact that the scenes we see in Ozu or Kiarostami's cinema, for instance, are significantly close scenes and movements of real life itself. Kiarostami said that he always tried his best to use the least industrial and technological facilities of the cinema to get as close as possible to the simplicity and reality of life. Despite the fact he likened the digital camera to freedom for filmmakers, he proved that he was not concerned with the technology and its potential. The filmmaker expressed the simple truth that just a camera and a tripod are enough for the cinema to capture life itself. His films reveal this important secret to us. It is notable to point out that Kiarostami, not only as a film director but as a great artist alone, is a perfect recent contemporary example of the claim that art and life can be brought together even by a digital device. The reality is that the feelings and its effects that are produced in encounter with art are completely separate from digital life, regardless of if the experience is mediated by art or not. In none of his works, whether photographs, films, or even his conceptual installations, can any sign of speed, ease, and digital superficiality be seen or felt.

CONCLUSION SUB-SECTIONS

Now, let me return to the major thought of this argumentation and follow the subject from the perspective of the performance art medium which is directly connected to my current art practice. Historically, "performance has been considered as a way of bringing to life the many

formal and conceptual ideas on which the making of art is based. Live gestures have constantly been used as a weapon against the convention of established art. [...] Moreover, within the history of the avant garde—meaning those artists who led the field in breaking with each successive tradition—performance in the twentieth century has been at the forefront of such an activity: an avant-avant-garde.”⁴⁵ Despite the origins of performance art as an established medium of artistic expression, rooted in the visual arts, on one hand, and the performing arts such as theatre, dance, and music, on the other, performance art itself is arguably connected to life more than anything else. In fact, all the arts mentioned in addition to cinema are all artistic *representations* of life. However performance art, otherwise expressed as the body present as subject and object in contemporary art practice, directly enacts and engages the space of real life. To be more precise, that is to say, in theatre, or cinema, even the fine arts, we always imagine them as something set in a different reality. Performance art, particularly *long duration performances* and *participatory performances*, becomes life itself. For that reason, the liveness of a performance art is an essential vehicle to communicate with the audience. It wields the possibility of interrupting the fast-paced life of our socio-political contexts. This interference in the space of life, society, and politics, is something that Western politics, civilization, and consequently its culture, is strongly opposed to. Western culture does not want the body to intervene as a living and conscious character. Moreover, this deprives us of the opportunity ‘to live’.

Clearly, I am not saying anything new, but I consider it important to emphasize that we are too much dependent upon technology, our computers, and smart phones etc., and as a result, forget about our body, senses, feelings, and emotions, in one word, our soul. That said, everything we do is actually working with and within the brain just like an apparatus, a machine, a device, and disregarding the existence of the body, our collective body. We do not translate things to our body where feelings, emotion and all senses play a role, where all come together, where the body and soul become one and inseparable. Since the active body of the artist and the audience, in performance art, is directly connected to life itself, it more than any other medium, can get so close to us that it touches our life and even our body. Hence, we can claim that the performance art medium is the only possible form that is capable of binding us, both physically and psychologically, to ourselves and those around us. It is also able to make life tangible for both the performer and the participant. It can even invisibly penetrate under our skin. Essentially, the post-war radical movements and avant-garde artists who turned to the strategic use of the body and created a phenomenon called *body art* are proof of this claim. “They explored the notion of consciousness, reaching to express the self that is invisible, formless, and liminal. They have addressed the issues of risk, fear, death, danger and sexuality, at times when the body has been most threatened by these things.”⁴⁶ They defended human rights and values, mainly with the body, blood, and breath—ultimately nothing but life—and these actions can be easily traced to countless examples in pages of contemporary art history. Some such historical examples, both as collective and individual artists, are the Guerrilla Art Action Group (GAAG), works by Viennese Actionists, Yoko Ono, Gina Pane, Ana Mendieta, Valie Export and her notion of ‘expanded cinema’ through the live body,⁴⁷ among many others who used performance—action—to bring direct attention to human

crises. But for the most part, contemporary democratic politics has been able to dismantle the infrastructure of these collective and unified actions and movements. It is not a surprise that this phenomenon appeared in most of the countries around the world that were involved in the contemporary wars. The increasingly commodified human life injected with 'speed' and 'ease', actually developed the conditions of digital life. That is to say, that we human beings are becoming more and more distant from each other and becoming more and more dependent upon technology and its instructions. This disintegration of us smells like death more than ever. We are digital bodies. Efficient but obedient bodies.

Let us ask ourselves the last questions like this: in such a 'state of exception' in which we live, who can shake a person from inside more than an artist, a philosopher, or an educator? Who has the ability to repair the broken spine of a life? I ask us to consider the fate of art and the artist who stands against the unjust rules of power and does not abide by them. Will they be expelled, fired, deported, or exiled? We are deprived of our personal life, so much so that it seems there are no other places left to be exiled. This begs the question if political resistance means the same as avant-garde gesture in political art and art politics. Perhaps, the key is returning to philosophy again and again. And so, returning to Agamben again one last time, "The avant-garde, which has lost itself over time, also pursues the primitive and the archaic. It is in this sense that one can say that the entry point to the present necessarily takes the form of an archeology; an archeology that does not, however, regress to a historical past, but returns to that part within the present that we are absolutely incapable of living. What remains un-lived therefore is incessantly sucked back toward the origin, without ever being able to reach it. [...] The attention to this "un-lived" is the life of the contemporary. And to be contemporary means in this sense to return to a present where we have never been."⁴⁸ I commit to the pursuit of the contemporary, the spirit of education, and the truth of the act of creation. This is not a thesis, this is a moment—a truth-life.

A MANIFESTO

A person's life

Moments are required for a life.
Moments, and always, and questions

What era are we living in? Post-postmodernism, or beyond that even? Clearly we are still defined as human beings. But what kind of being? Whatever kind though our organism still works with warm blood. That's a fact. The warm body still has senses. Is this true? Does the warm body still have feelings? I think so. We should have emotion then. Is emotion required for this kind of human life that we have now? Another fact is that the human body does have a brain. This is truth. Does contemplating matter? Perhaps? Does emotion, thinking, feelings, senses, love, life, matter? Essentially, does a warm body matter? Do ethics matter? Perhaps? Does a better being matter? Does peace matter? If it all matters, then where are we? Who are we? If a better being matters, then time should matter. Moments matter. Moments matter as a starting point no matter where we are – post-postmodern era or meta-modernism. Moments should be required for a new world; revolutionary moments.

Moments
of love
of risk
of pain
of touch
moments
to love
to risk
to receive
to touch
moments
of losing
of gaining

of making
of breaking
all bright moments are required for a person's life
all dark moments are required for a person's life
liveness is required for a person's life
happiness is required for a person's life
sadness is required for a person's life
energy is required too
to have
to give
to get
to change
but the reality is fear which is a culture now, which is there, which has been there for a long time
but a person must not be a chicken
death is part of a person's life
fear cannot stop a person's death

An artist's work

Moments are required for a life and art.
Moments, and always, and questions

The requirements for an artist:

there must be a clear difference between an artist and an art worker
artist's life is required for an artist
artist's understanding of totalitarianism is required for an artist
artist's understanding of a people is required for an artist
artist's ethic is required for an artist
artist's obligation is required for an artist
artist's experience is required for an artist
artist's cognition is required for an artist
artist's boldness is required for an artist
artist's sensibility is required for an artist
artist's sensitivity is required for an artist
artist's body is required for an artist
artist's uncertainty is required for an artist
artist's social responsibility is required for an artist
artist's radicalism is required for an artist
artist's becoming is required for an artist

Aesthetic argumentation of an artist

there must be a clear difference between art and something else
an aesthetic revolution is required for a contemporary artist's work
society is required for an artist's work
social time is required for an artist's work
power relationship is required for an artist's work
temporality is required for an artist's work
philosophy is required for an artist's work
political aesthetic is required for an artist's work
risk-taking is required for an artist's work
an event in the world of art, with the artist's relation to a real world is required for an artist's work
entertainment is NOT required for an artist's work
fear is NOT required for an artist's work
everyday studio practice is NOT required for an artist's work

Radical position of an artist

there must be a clear difference between a capitalist and an artist
art must not be capital
an artist must not be a capitalist
art should not be voiceless
an artist should not be a survivor
art should not be decorative
an artist should not be a laborer
art should make a history
an artist should not be an historian
art should talk with people
an artist should stretch across borderlines
art must not be at the service of political power
an artist must be against political power

an artist must wake up with a question
an artist must go to bed with a question
an artist must die with a question

death is part of an artist's life
a body is required for an artist's death
a grave is required for both a person's corpse and an artist's dead body.

NOTES

- 1 - Foucault, *This Is Not a Pipe*, 1983, 12.
- 2 - The term artist originated in the late 1990s during a meeting of East L.A. Chicana/o art movement artists and Mexican Zapatistas.
- 3 - Asante, Jr., M. K., *IT'S BIGGER THAN HIP HOP: the rise of the post-hip-hop generation*, St. Martin's Press, New York, 2008, 203.
- 4 - See *The Oxford Companion to Philosophy*, 2005, 915.
- 5 - Ibid., 916.
- 6 - Foucault, *This Is Not a Pipe*, 1983, 19.
- 7 - Ibid., 21.
- 8 - See "Third Sketch of a Manifesto of Affirmationist Art" in Badiou, *Polemics*, 2011, 143.
- 9 - Badiou, *Bodies, Languages, Truths*, 2006.
- 10 - Michelet, *The People*, 1973, 120.
- 11 - Badiou, *Bodies, Languages, Truths*, 2006.
- 12 - A Greek word signifying opinions, beliefs, conjectures, estimates. A very important notion in Aristotle's philosophical methodology, where it means the 'things that are said' by many [...]. See *The Oxford Companion to Philosophy*, 2005, 220.
- 13 - Badiou, *Bodies, Languages, Truths*, 2006.
- 14 - Agamben, *Resistance in Art*, lecture delivered at European Graduate School, August 2014.
- 15 - Vinthagen and Anna Johansson, *Conceptualizing 'Everyday Resistance': A Transdisciplinary Approach*, 2020, 28.
- 16 - Badiou, *Polemics*, 2011, 137.
- 17 - See Chapter 1, To be young, today: sense and nonsense in Badiou, *The True Life*, 30-38.
- 18 - Badiou, *Bodies, Languages, Truths*, 2006.
- 19 - Kester, *The One and The Many: Contemporary Collaboration Art in a Global Context*, Duke University Press, 2011, 176.
- 20 - Rancière, *The Emancipated Spectator*, trans. Gregory Elliott, Verso, 2009, 19.
- 21 - Kester, *The One and The Many*, 2011, 19.
- 22 - Helguera, *Education for Socially Engaged Art*, Jorge Pinto Books New York, 2011, 12.
- 23 - Ibid., 13.
- 24 - Sholette, *Dark Matter: Art and Politics in the Age of Enterprise Culture*, Pluto Press, 2011, ix.
- 25 - Rancière, *The Emancipated Spectator*, 17.
- 26 - Kester, *The One and The Many*, 2011, 19.
- 27 - Sholette, *Dark Matter*, 2011, ix.
- 28 - Rancière, *DISSENSUS On Politics and Aesthetics*, 2010, 142.
- 29 - Kafka, *The Great Wall of China*, trans. Willa and Edwin Muir, Schocken books. New York, 1970, 160-161.

- 30 - Kirostami, *A wolf Lying in Wait* (Selected Poems), Sokhan, 2005, 44.
- 31 - Kester, *The One and The Many*, 2011, 188.
- 32 - Sheren, *Portable Borders: Performance Art and Politics on the U.S. Frontera Since 1984*, 2015, 16.
- 33 - See "A History of High Line Art" in *High Art: Public Art on the High Line*, 2015, 17.
- 34 - Agamben, Giorgio, *WHAT IS AN APPARATUS?*, trans. by David Kishik and Stefan Pedatella, Stanford University Press, 2009, 39.
- 35 - Ibid., 41.
- 36 - Ibid., 44.
- 37 - Danto, *After the End of Art: contemporary art and the pale of history*, Princeton University Press, 1997, 182.
- 38 - Read, *Education Through Art*, Pantheon Books, 1974., 288-289.
- 39 - Agamben, *Means Without End*, Trans. Vincenzo Binetti and Cesare Casarino, University of Minnesota Press, 2000, 79.
- 40 - Ibid., 87.
- 41 - Debord, *The Society of the Spectacle*, trans. Donald Nicholson-Smith, Zone Books, 1999, 36.
- 42 - Agamben, *Means Without End*, 136.
- 43 - Read, *Education Through Art*, 11.
- 44 - Agamben, *Means Without End*, 54.
- 45 - Goldberg, *Performance Art from Futurism to the Present*, Thames & Hudson World of Art, Third edition, 2014, 7.
- 46 - *The Artist's Body*, edited by Tracey Warr, Phaidon Press, 2015, 11.
- 47 - In public performance, *TAP and TOUCH CINEMA*, 1968, Export made and carried a box attached to her bare torso, participants were invited to put their hands through the curtain covering the opening and touch her body. Her notion of 'expanded cinema' was that the live body activated the experimental screen-free "film".
- 48 - Agamben, Giorgio, *WHAT IS AN APPARATUS?*, 51-52.

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